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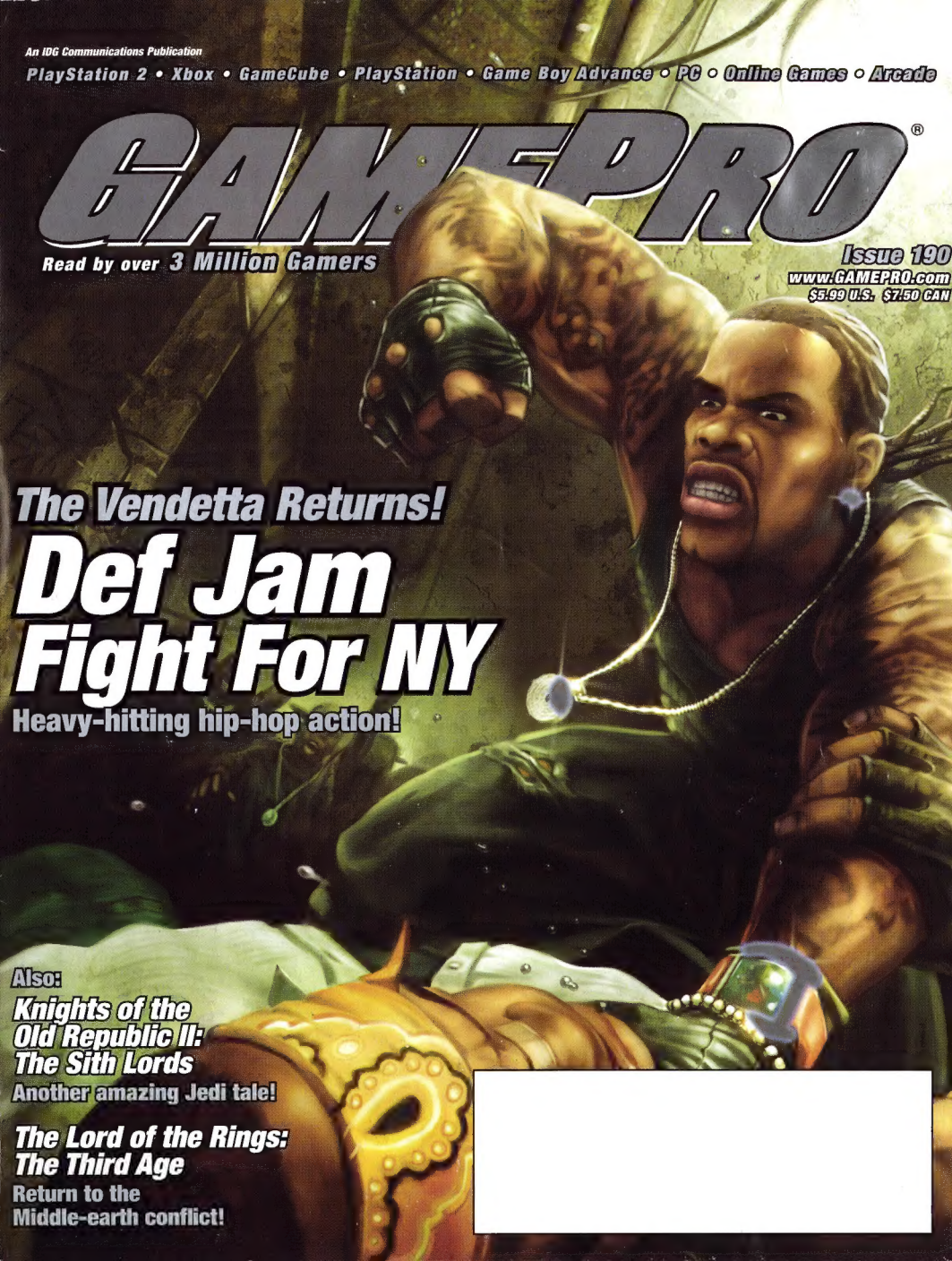

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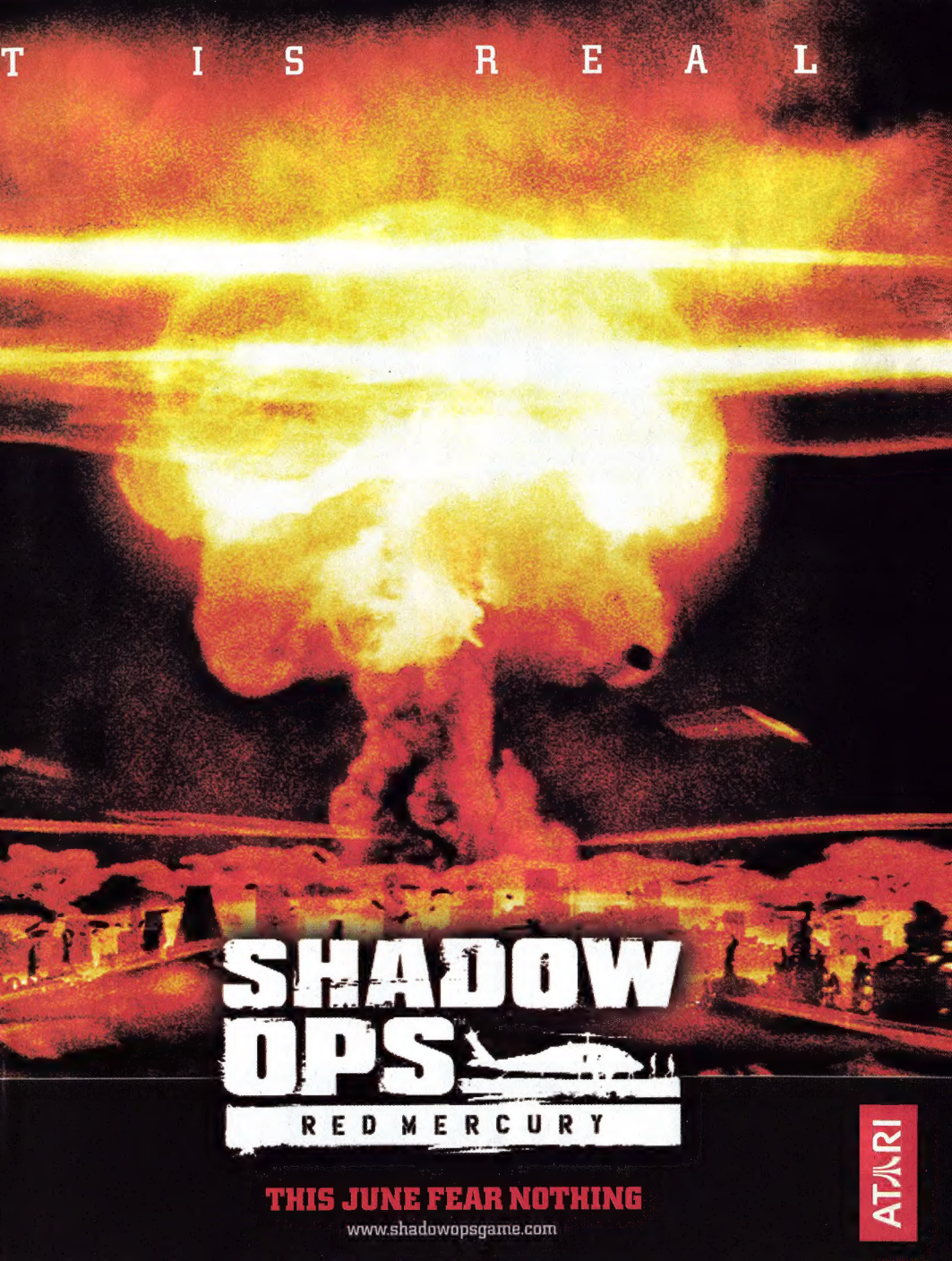
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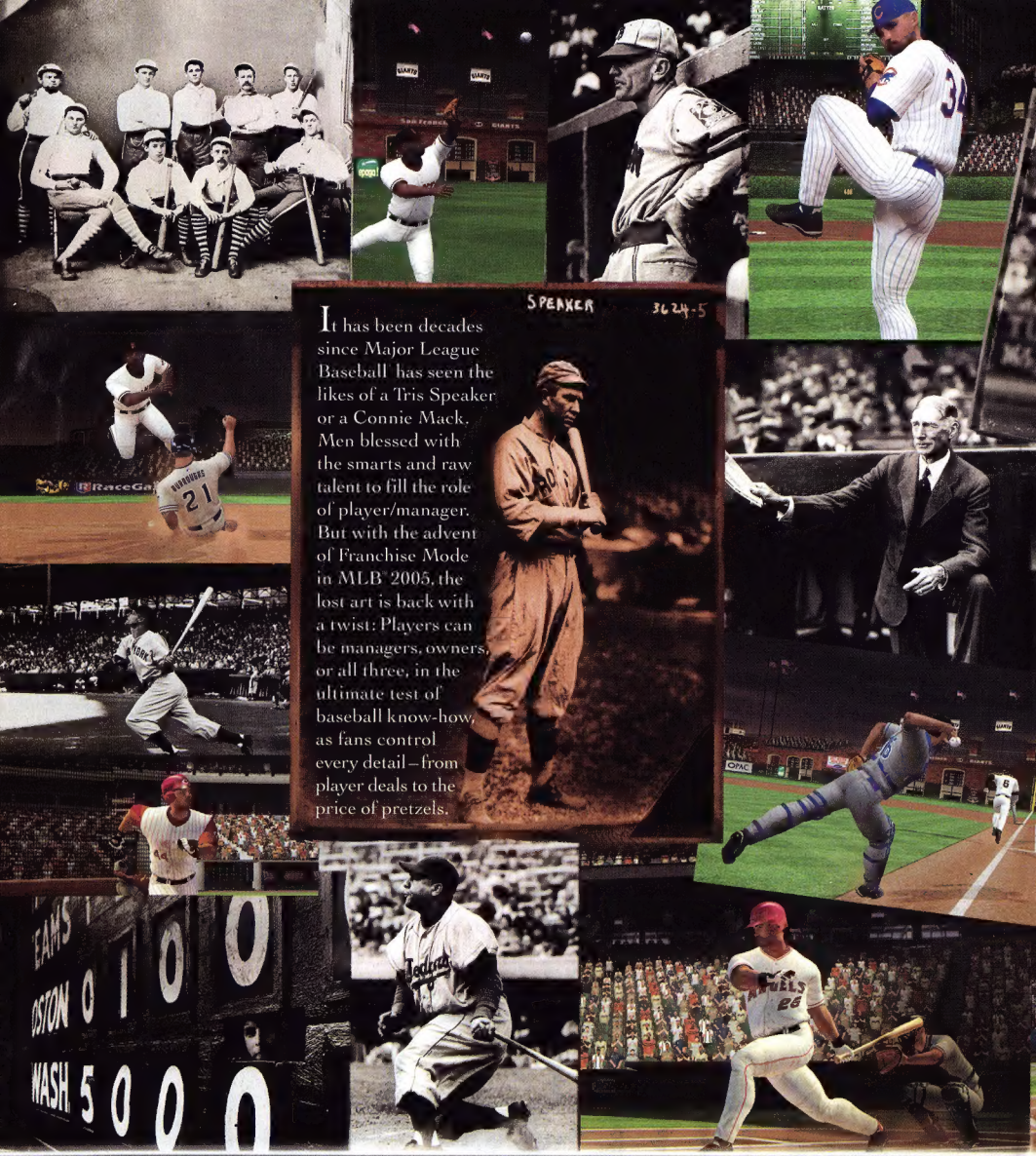

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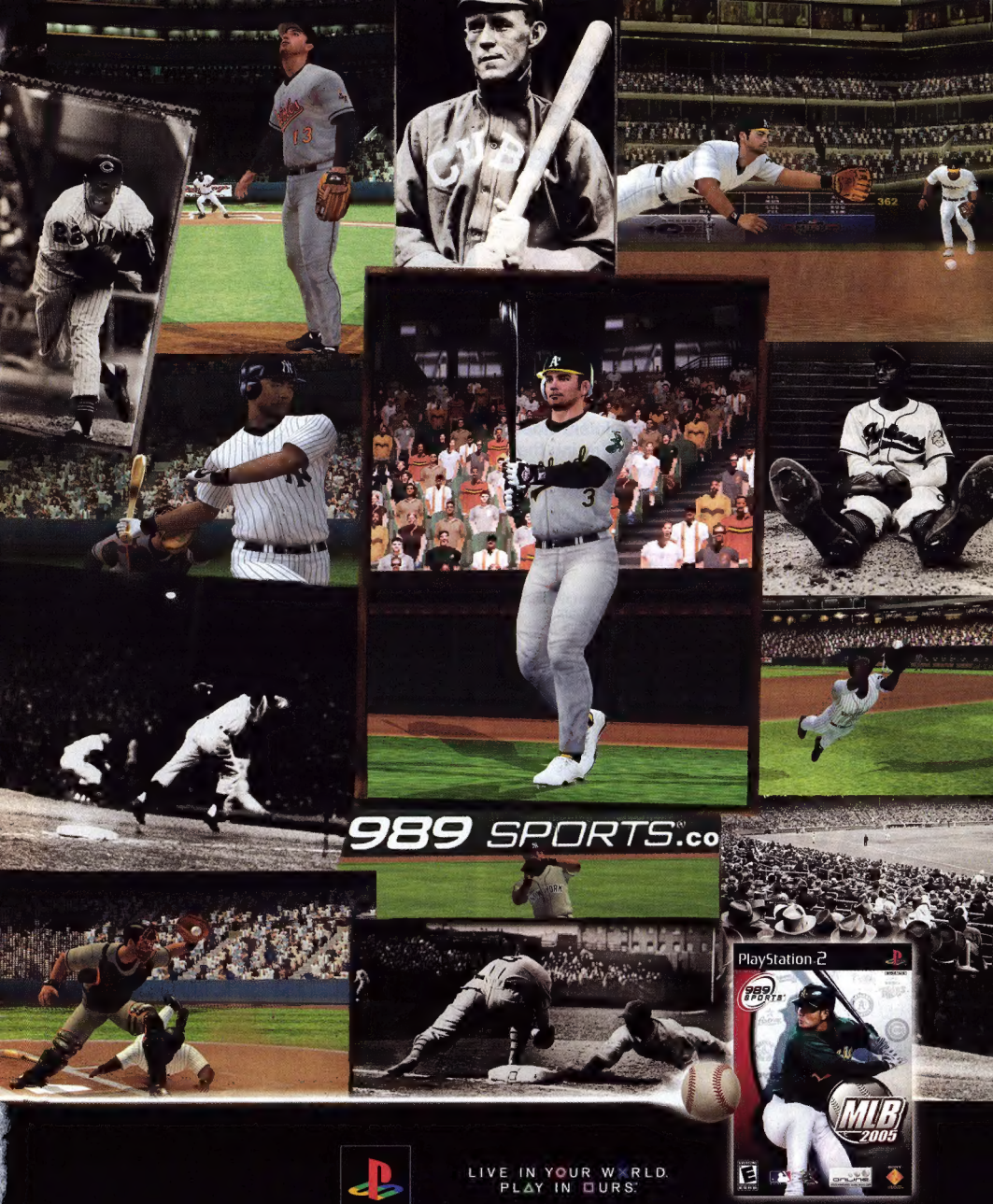

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEATURES

28 Def Jam Fight For NY

Busta Rhymes, Snoop Dogg, Method Man, Ludacris, Lil' Kim, Sean Paul—what do these folks have in common? That's right...they all like to kick ass! Prepare to wreak havoc on the hip-hop underground.

32 Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords

Just say "KOTOR" and every RPG/action fan knows what you're talking about. Here's the lowdown on the next installment of the game that once again made Star Wars a "force" to be reckoned with.

38 Juiced

Other street racing games emphasize over-the-top action, but here's one that hopes to introduce you to the real deal. Get ready to punch it with Acclaim's authentic street-racing sim.

44 The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age

Ever since the end of the trilogy—games and movies—everyone's been pining for a way to return to Middle-earth. This RPG promises to once again let you play a hand in Tolkien's classic tale.

46 10 to 1: The Worst Movie Games Ever

As odd as it may sound, everyone has their "favorite" worst movie-based video game. Whether you consider them thinkers or stinkers, here's a list of titles that made the trek from box office to boxed game, for reasons that remain shrouded in mystery.

DEPARTMENTS

12 Loading...

54 Sneak Previews

72 ProReviews

78 PC GamePro

84 Games To Go

90 Sports Pages

98 Role-Player's Realm

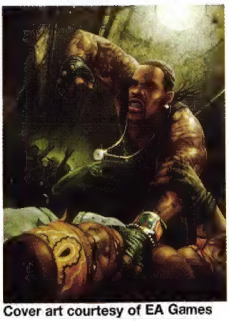

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

...WINNING

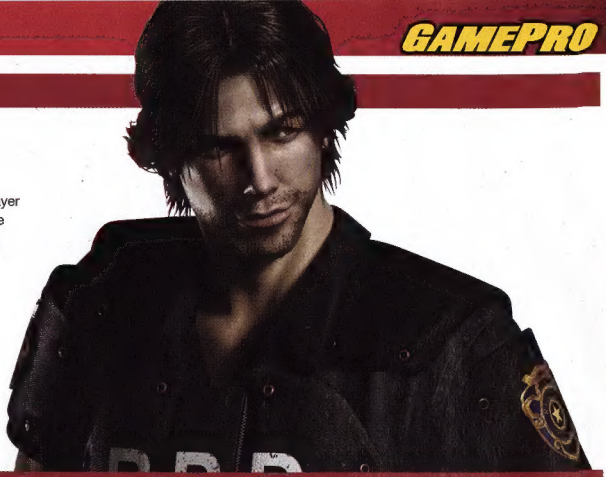
ProStrategy Guide

104 Resident Evil Outbreak

Whether you're playing as a single player or in multiplayer mode online, Resident Evil Outbreak presents unique challenges and obstacles that go beyond escaping zombies. Here's how to get Outbreak under control.

110 Code Vault

Who says cheaters never prosper? Take a look at these cool codes for The Suffering (PS2, Xbox), Tenchu: Return from Darkness (Xbox), ESPN NBA Basketball 2K4 (PS2, Xbox), Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II (Xbox), and more.



GAME FINDER

Previews

Ace Combat 5 60
Baten Kaitos 101
Brothers in Arms 66
The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay 70
Dead to Rights II 68
Death by Degrees 68
Dragon Ball Z: Super Sonic Warriors 84
Duel Masters: Sempai Legends 84
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee 71
Dynasty Warriors 4 Empires 67
ESPN NFL 2005 92
EverQuest II 81
Far Cry Instincts 66
Full Spectrum Warrior 56
Ghosthunter 59
IndyCar Series 2005 95
Iron Phoenix 71
Jade Empire 100
Killzone 58
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude 71
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events 66
Madden NFL 2005 90
McFarlane's Evil Prophecy 67
Metal Slug 3 64
Metal Slug Advance 84
NASCAR Thunder 2005 93
NCAA Football 2005 94
Need for Speed Underground 2 54
Pikmin 2 63
Resident Evil Outbreak File #2 55
Rise of the Kasai 70
Rocky Legends 95
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury 59
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne 101
Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2 95
Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed . . . 18
Star Wars Republic Commando 63
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection 70
Tales of Symphonia 99
Terminator 3: The Redemption 62
Thief: Deadly Shadows 55
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone 62
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow . . 64
World of Warcraft 80
WWE Day of Reckoning 67
Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Bose 98

Reviews

Multiplatform

Hitman: Contracts 76
MLB SlugFest Loaded 96
Red Dead Revolver 75

PlayStation 2

Bujingai: The Forsaken City 77
Final Fantasy XI 102
Front Mission 4 103
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege 74
UFC: Sudden Impact 76

Xbox

RalliSport Challenge 2 77

GameCube

The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures 72

Game Boy Advance

Classic NES Series: Donkey Kong 88
Classic NES Series: Super Mario Bros. 88
Mario Golf: Advance Tour 86
Mario vs. Donkey Kong 86
River City Ransom EX 88
Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon 88

PC

Painkiller 78

Codes and Cheats

Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II 110
Bomberman Jetters 113
Corvette 114
ESPN NBA Basketball 2K4 111
Gladius 114
Looney Tunes: Back in Action 113
MTX Mototrax 111
MX Unleashed 112
NASCAR Thunder 2004 114
NHL Rivals 2004 112
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku 113
Star Trek: Shattered Universe 110
The Suffering 110
Tenchu: Return from Darkness 111
Transworld Surf: Next Wave 113
Wrath Unleashed 112

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Retro Flashback

Re-releasing old games seems to be all the rage these days as developers dig through their vaults to bring classic titles to the current generation of gamers. The *GamePro* crew sat down and compiled its own "Retro Top 10" of classic games that deserve to be seen again.

Wireless How-To

Tired of dealing with a snarled mess of wires every time you want to get your computer online? No easy way to connect your Xbox or PlayStation 2 to the cable modem? We delve into the world of wireless networking with an in-depth how-to and explain everything you need to know to cut the cord permanently.

E3 2004

E³ Wrap-Up

The show of shows might be over, but all of our stories are archived online. If you missed the live coverage, don't worry. Head to GamePro.com right now and search for "E³ 2004" to find the goods!

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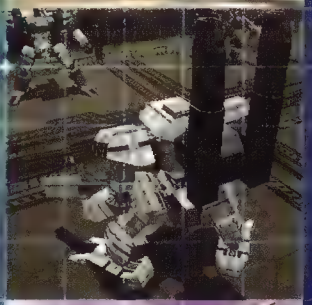

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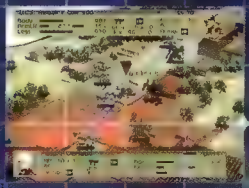

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Madden Football—in the Middle of July!

Video games can build followings that take on a life of their own, sometimes beyond any sense of reason or justice.

Using game sales in 2003 as a gauge of popularity, Enter the Matrix, Dragon Ball Z: Budokai, Final Fantasy, and Grand Theft Auto represent that broad and sometimes odd range of quality versus quantity. Whatever you (or we) may think about the quality of these titles, you (or some of you) certainly voted with your dollars last year to make them top sellers. But according to the NPD Group (the primary bean counters of the video-game industry) no game in 2003 sold more copies than Madden NFL 2004. At 4 million-plus, Madden dusted the next closest contenders by about 3 mil (Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire at numbers two and three, by the way).

Next to action, sports is the most popular game genre in America, and in its 16 years in the game market, Madden has come to signify video-game football—much to the consternation of worthy competitors at Sega Sports/ESPN Videogames, 989 Sports, etc. Conspiracy theorists trace the disappearance of Tecmo Bowl and the appearance of NFL Blitz to Madden's doorstep.

Some say death and taxes are inevitable; others say it's the next version of Madden football. What's the magic in Madden? Here's a game that doesn't really need TV commercials, downloads, or magazine covers to sell well. It personifies word-of-mouth marketing and the concept of mindshare. Everyone knows it's coming, everyone knows what it's all about, everyone knows it's probably going to be a good game. Probably? In regards to gameplay, Madden arguably personifies the concept of "money," too.

It's even hard to imagine the catastrophic turn of events that could bring about Madden football's downfall. Possibly some tabloid scandal involving John Madden would do it. However, the other day at the cash register of the local video-game trading post, one serious but youthful football gamer—with Madden NFL 2004 in hand—wondered aloud, "Whose team does Madden play for, anyway?"

This issue, the Sports Pages feature *GamePro*'s first preview of Madden Football 2005.

The GamePros, Oakland, CA
letters@gamepro.com

Making Something from Nothing

The way I understand it, game development takes two to three years from start to finish, which makes sense considering all the work that goes into it. So if the PlayStation 3 comes out in 2006, does that mean that they're already starting to make games for it? How the heck do you make games for a system that hasn't even been created yet? Are launch titles all rush jobs? Do you guys know anything about this?

▶ Walrus Man 2000—Via Internet

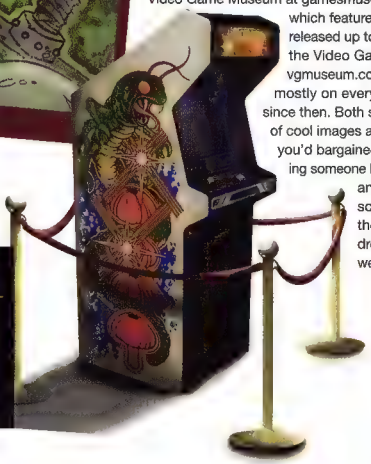
Yep, games are already in development for the next wave of machines, though you won't get much in the way of evidence at this stage. We've heard rumors that some developers already have early versions of development kits—hardware that's built to the same rough specs that the final consoles will be. The folks who don't have those tools yet are conceptualizing, building assets, textures, models, and story lines in preparation for the day they'll get their hands on the next hardware. It's sort of a favored nations thing—the developers that have the highest profile and make the publishers look the best will have first crack at the new tools in hopes that they will have enough time to explore and exploit that hardware in time for the launch. Rush jobs? Sometimes, but it's not in Sony's (or Microsoft's or Nintendo's) best interest to withhold the tools from the people who can put them to the best use.

Now Museum, Now You Don't

Are there any video-game museums in the world? I think a place where a person can see some of the rarest video-game stuff would be great. It would be great to see a Famicom or original commercials for a now-classic games. Being able to see stuff that most gamers have only seen in a magazine and having access to any video-game data on a museum computer would be incredible—and, of course, they'd have old *GamePro* issues on file.

▶ Jared Thorbahn—Newark, OH

Well, naturally! It's a great idea and one that a lot of gamers would like to see happen. There have been a few attempts at this, such as The National Coin-Op and Video Game Museum in St. Louis (now sadly closed), and the excellent, sporadically traveling Videotopia exhibit (see videotopia.com for more info), but there is currently no permanent, public archive of video gaming's rich history. However, while there may be no physical museum, there are certainly a lot of virtual ones. Two of the best are the Classic Home Video Game Museum at gamesmuseum.h-body.org, which features home systems released up to about 1985, and the Video Game Museum at vgmuseum.com, which focuses mostly on everything released since then. Both sites include tons of cool images and more info than you'd bargained for. Here's hoping someone breaks ground on an actual building sometime soon—the museum you dream about is one we dream about, too.



Loading...

Head 2 Head 12
Buyers Beware 16
NetPro 18
GeekSpeak 18
ProNews 22
GamePro Labs 24
Static 24
Internal Combustion 24

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Hyper...Active?

I'm a big fan of *GamePro*, and I'm also a big fan of Street Fighter. The last Street Fighter game was EX2 for the PS2, and I'm wondering if Capcom is planning any new Street Fighter games for any of the console systems.

▶ Sterling Starks—Freeport, NY

Happily, yes. Later this year, Capcom will issue the Street Fighter Anniversary Collection for the PS2, containing Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike and Hyper Street Fighter II in one package. Hyper is something of a classic-fighting-fan's dream—it takes all 16 characters from the first five SF games—Street Fighter II, Street Fighter II: Champion Edition, Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting, Super Street Fighter II, and Super Street Fighter II Turbo—and remixes them into one big brawl, letting you mix and match the different versions at will. Wanna know more? You'll find some screens in this month's Sneak Previews section.

Out at Second

What is the second-person view in video games? I know third-person is Resident Evil, first-person is Medal of Honor...but what is second-person?

▶ Lester Jeffries—Chicago, IL

Second-person is...well, third-person. Or maybe vice-versa. Confused? It's not your fault—gamers, game magazines, and the game industry have used the wrong term for years. First-person is just what you describe—Halo, Doom, and any of the other games you could name where you see the game world through the lead character's eyes. What most gamers call third-person—over-the-shoulder cameras, such as Tomb Raider and Syphon Filter as well as side-scrolling views seen in classic Mario and Sonic games—is really second-person. The player is a spectator—close enough to experience the game world and feel involved, but still watching the lead character (even if they control it). True third-person views are found in games like The Sims and Command & Conquer, omniscient world views that are independent from wherever the action might be taking place. If you want to watch a corner of the WarCraft battlefield where nothing's happening, you're certainly free to do so—you're not tied to the action. Make more sense now? The truth is out there, but the second-person/third-person misnomer isn't likely to go away anytime soon.

Art Attack!

M. Siegil—Lakeville, MN

3 Million Readers Can't Be Wrong

I've been a subscriber of *GamePro* for a while, and I've been noticing something on your cover. Early issues had a small box that read: Read by 3.6 million gamers each month! Over time (like a couple of months) the amount went down to 3.4 million, then 3.2 million, then 3 million. It's been at 3 million for a while. I was wondering if the amount of readers actually went down or you just rounded the amount a little more. That's the only thing I can find wrong...otherwise *GamePro* is my favorite gaming magazine. Keep up the good work!

▶ E.J. Reilly—Via Internet

That number is based on fluctuating circulation and what we call pass-along readership. If the magazine sells 500,000 copies a month (which it does, at least that many) and each copy is read by, say, six people (which is the average, when you get into things like borrowed copies and doctor's offices and stuff like that), then 3 million people are reading *GamePro* every month. That number goes up and down as both our circulation changes (when we sell 515,462 copies a month and 5.7 people read them, the math gets fun) and as our readers tell us how many other people read their copy (family members, friends, etc). Sometimes it's 3.6 million, sometimes it's 3.1 million—but saying "over 3 million" is just a heck of a lot easier.

OopsPro

Page 64 of the April issue said that Metal Gear Solid came out in 1986 for the PlayStation. Um, no—1998 is the correct date as many readers pointed out. Furthermore, the original Metal Gear on the NES didn't even come out until 1987. It would be great to say that was an April Fools' joke, but we goofed. Well, Major Mike goofed. But he admitted it and apologized, so we're not going to tease him about it.

The GamePro Enigma II—Solved!

Those readers still scouring the March 2004 issue for cryptic clues to the GamePro Enigma II can finally rest their eyes—the hidden contest has been found, solved, and explained. The winner, Brian Calaci, earned a customized GamePro leather jacket by answering "September 9, 1995," which was the day the original PlayStation was released in the United States. About two dozen clues were buried in the issue; they're all explained in a detailed article on GamePro.com. Thanks for entering—and keep your wits about you for the GamePro 3nigma next year....

For more letters, go to GamePro.com!

Got a strange urge to communicate with the *GamePro* editors? E-mail them at **"editor's name"@gamepro.com**!

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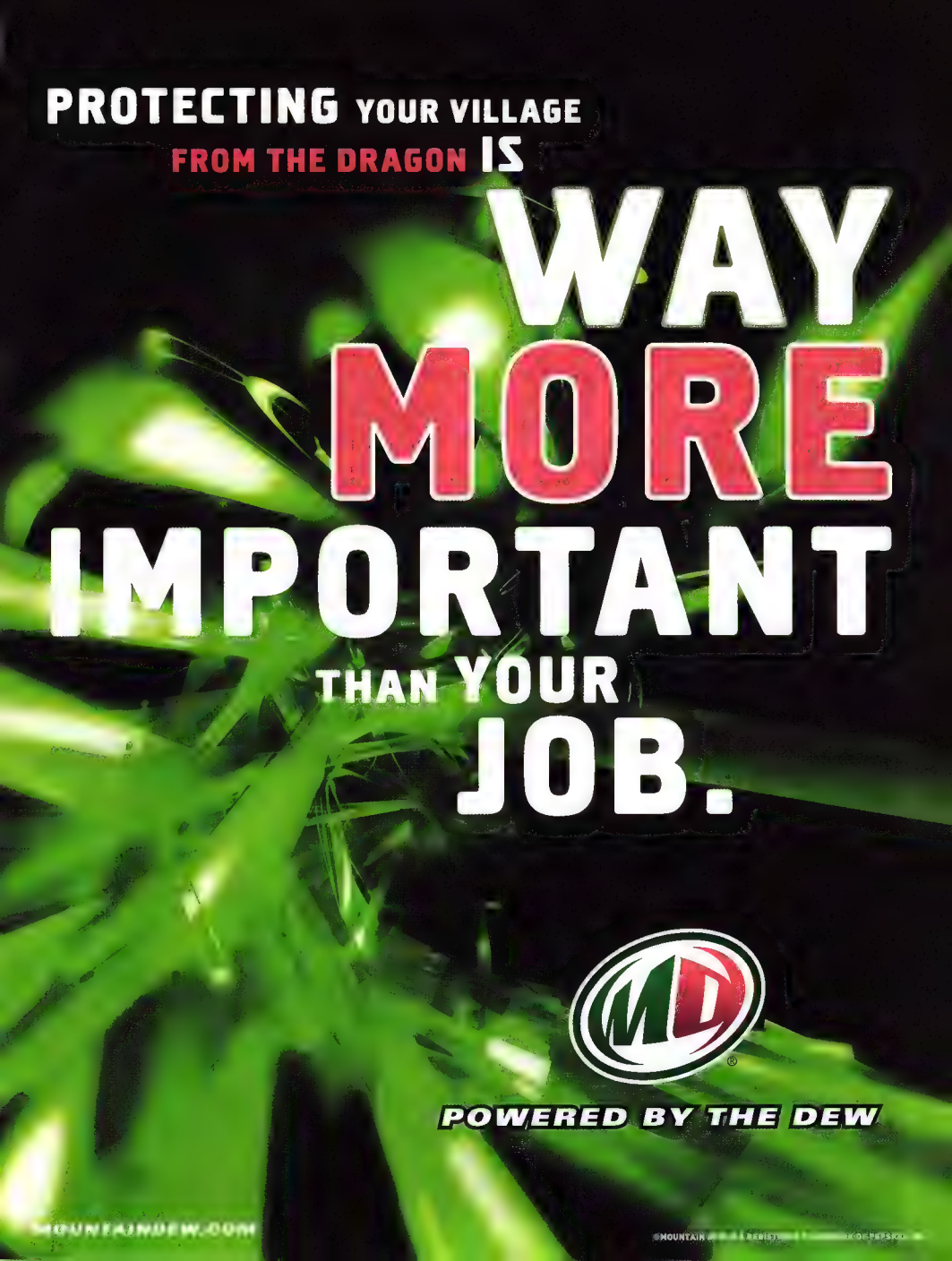
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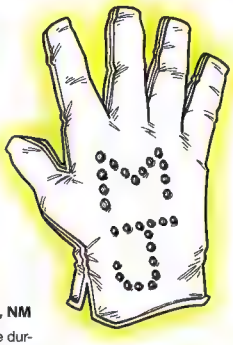
BUYERS BEWARE

The Watch Dog revisits net lag with another popular PC game, Halo. No more typing "SUX" in capital letters to let the whole online community know how your rig coughs at the sight of a Warthog. Now if only the kids who don't know how to drive vehicles wouldn't camp around them, the world would be a perfect place.

EyeToy Loves Mimes



I bought one of those cool EyeToys, and it works great, except for one thing—it's afraid of the night. It sees me well during the daytime, and I have fun boxing with robots and whatnot, until it gets dark outside. At first, I thought it was because it was too dark to see me so I turned on some lights in the house to see if that helped. I jumped around like a monkey, stood on my head, danced like I was crazy, and cried like a baby, just to see if it saw my motion... erg, not really.

▶ Marcus Dowdican—Albuquerque, NM

Because your EyeToy was working fine during the daytime, it's definitely a lighting issue. Make sure you're in a well-lit room that gives good overall lighting to yourself—you want to be sure that the EyeToy's only picking up your own movements. Check to see that there's nothing distracting moving in the background as well. Also, if the lighting's blindingly bright, the camera won't be able to pick out movements either.

If you just can't get enough lighting, hold or wear something light-colored on your hands—you can wear white gloves, making yourself more noticeable to the camera (and to concerned friends and relatives as well). If you think wearing white gloves makes you look too much like a mime, raver, or Michael Jackson before all the nose surgery, you can always just hold sheets of white paper. The Watch Dog recommends that you continue jumping like a monkey, though—your friends dig it.

Halo: Combat Lagged

What is with the extremely, incredibly, remarkably laggy slowdown that happens in the PC version of Halo? I've heard about it having some slowdown on more midrange PCs, but that it goes away if you turn down details and texture quality. I have a Pentium 4 3.0 GHz computer with 512 MB RAM and a GeForce 5200 card. And it lags... terribly. Pretty much unplayable.

I can turn everything down to the point where it looks almost like the original Doom, and it still lags. Unreal II, for example, has twice the graphics, and it doesn't lag, even when details and video quality are maxed out! I'm hoping for some kind of suggestion or answer...or for the Microsoft offices to be overtaken by the Covenant themselves.

▶ Den L.—Via Internet

We contacted the Covenant and...ahem. Actually, short of turning your game into 3D graphics reminiscent of Star Fox, there are a number of tweaks you can do to make the game run faster.

1) The basics: Make sure your video card and motherboard have the latest drivers. Also, be sure you have the latest patch, which can be downloaded at microsoft.com/games/halo/support.asp.
2) Force the game to use a different rendering pipeline. In plain speak, this just means don't implement special effects, such as bump-mirrored surfaces, that aren't used for the multiplayer portion of the game anyway. Add –use11 to the command line. For those who don't know what a "command line" is, right-click on the shortcut for Halo and click properties. In the target field, you will see "C:\Program Files\Microsoft Games\Halo\halo.exe" (or something along those lines, depending on whether you installed it in that directory). Add a –use11 after it, remembering to put a space between the halo.exe and –use11.
3) Turn off shadows and decals. While they look cool, they bog down video cards, especially midrange ones like the GeForce 5200. However, Bungie recommends that you keep particles or effects to get a visual radius of different explosions.
4) Turn down Sound Variety. Although almost unnoticeable, each weapon has a bunch of different sounds for firing (the assault rifle has 15). Turning down the Sound Variety saves the computer the trouble of going through all the sounds, choosing only a couple to save in its cache.
5) Be honest about your connection speed. Halo's servers will regulate how much info to send to you depending on your reported connection speed. Go to the network settings and be truthful about your speed—if you have a 56k modem and have the setting set to T1/LAN, the server may be sending you more information than you can handle, causing lag.
6) Play on dedicated servers. A slow server means a slow game no matter how fast your computer is. Be sure you're on a server with a low ping.

Halo automatically keeps the game running at 30 frames per second, even if it can do better, so if you're wondering why you're not getting 60 FPS, nobody else is. Also, if you have a VIA motherboard, check for the latest four-in-one patch at www.via.com.tw/.

Submissions

At *GamePro*, listening is what we do best. When you have a problem with a product or feel you've been ripped off, we want to know. Write to:

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Sony: 800/345-7669
Nintendo: 800/255-3700
Microsoft: 800/469-9269

BUG ALERT

NINJA GAIDEN XBOX

DEVELOPED BY TEAM NINJA
PUBLISHED BY TECMO

There's a minor bug in the game where the text doesn't scroll down in the diary. However, only users who have their controller plugged into a slot other than the first one will encounter this bug. Tecmo instructs you to "disconnect the DVD player (dongle) from the console and make sure you have controller one plugged into the controller one slot of the system." This will solve any problems with text not scrolling.

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW XBOX

DEVELOPED AND PUBLISHED BY UBISOFT

Just as the game shipped to stores, a serious bug that caused the game to freeze when displaying Optimatch or Quick Match results was reported. Ubisoft has announced that an autoupdate is available online to fix the issue. The game will automatically update the next time you connect to Xbox Live.

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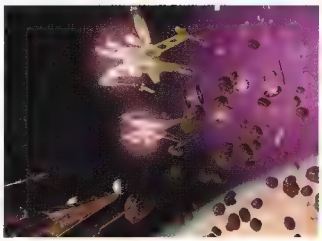
Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed

Taking an existing MMORPG into space ain't like dustin' crops, boy. Here's a good look at how Star Wars Galaxies is doing it.

Star Wars Galaxies was developed as a land-based MMORPG with the promise of space travel sometime in the months after launch. Back then, there were two big space-based MMOs: CCP's Eve Online and EA's Earth & Beyond. Since then, EA announced its abandonment of E&B, prompting CCP to offer displaced E&B players incentives to sign up for Eve. The point? The space-based MMO genre is both dangerous and wide-open for conquest just as LucasArts prepares to launch its expansion to the stars.

Jump to Lightspeed seems to mark a change to Galaxies in that the expansion will enable real-time dogfighting as opposed to the traditional pseudo-turn-based combat Galaxies (and other MMORPGs) holds at its core. If you've played PlanetSide, you can imagine what it'd be like to pilot an X-Wing in outer space and take on swarms of TIE Fighters. If LucasArts can pull it off, the space combat in the expansion would make E&B's combat look snoozeworthy by comparison.



The expansion's not just about flying starships, though; it's about building them and taking them on missions as well. Players will find plans for ships ranging from TIE Fighters to Corellian transports, and they'll be able to add astromech droids (R2?) to improve the ships' performance. Pilots can fly for the Rebellion, the Empire, or just for the highest bidder, and take on over 100 new missions, solo adventures, and player-vs.-player encounters. Also, just in case flying around in space isn't enough, Jump to Lightspeed includes the MMO-expansion requisite of two new playable species.

There's room for expansion in space, but the market's proven that it's a wide-open and unpopulated region for online gaming. Galaxies has done well enough on the ground so it will be interesting to see how things go in the stars.—*Dunjin Master*

Geek Speak

The nerdy side of gaming in plain English

By MC Squared

Q What the hell are bits? I've wondered that for a long time.

Majinvash—Via GamePro.com Forums

A What took you so long to ask, dawg? It's a crucial question, especially because the word has been the focal point of the console wars for close to 20 years now—and it's widely misunderstood.

The word "bit" is actually a contraction of the phrase "binary digit" and was coined in 1947 by my homeboy, John Tukey. Bits are the smallest basic unit of measurement when it comes to computer information, whether you're talking about the capacity of a chip or simple data storage. Bits are totally binary—they either store a piece of information (giving them a value of 1) or they don't (giving them a value of 0). Put a bunch of bits together, and you get into something a little more complicated but a lot more useful like bytes (a thousand of which are measured in kilobytes, and then a thousand kilobytes becomes a megabyte). There are eight bits to a byte, eight bites to a sandwich. Ha, ha. But you get the idea; it's just a unit of measurement.

64-bit? Whadupwidat?

How does it apply to gaming? You've heard that the NES is an 8-bit system, the Super NES is a 16-bit system, the PlayStation is a 32-bit system, and so on. That number is in regards to the main processor of each system; the more bits the main chip can process, the faster and more complicated the instructions can become. That's why an Atari 2600 game (an 8-bit system) looks primitive next to a Sega Genesis game (16-bit)—the Genesis's innards were designed to handle more data.

And then there's the Jaguar. See, in 1993, everybody else was using the number of bits based on their machine's main processor; Atari had a custom chip inside the Jaguar that used 64-bit technology, but many of the other processors were 32-bit (except the main CPU, the one that directed all the other chips—that was merely 16-bit). Was Atari lying to gamers, or are you just too stupid to know what "64-bit" actually means? The jury is still out; people are still arguing about the Jaguar's bit designation. Seriously, it's best to avoid the whole mess.

That defines bits in terms of processors; storage is a different matter. Just to make things more confusing, 16-bit cartridges were often measured in megabits, the "mega" prefix denoting a million bits. Lots of SNES cartridges stored 8 megabits of data; some went as high as 48 megabits (though the SNES was technically capable of handling much more, the big-ass chips got really expensive). The big misconception here was that the boxes would say "24 Meg!" and people would assume that "meg" meant "megabyte," which is totally different and a whole hell of a lot larger. Sometimes, selectively informing the audience has its advantages.

And don't even ask why 1 kilobit isn't 1000 bits but is actually 1024 bits. That's another column.

Got a gaming tech question? Send it to geekspeak@gamepro.com!

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Violent Games And Legal Weapons

Proposed laws would restrict sales to minors

Is it an election year or what? As the country prepares to vote for its leaders later in 2004, legislators from coast to coast are proposing bills regarding the hot-button issue of violent video games—more specifically, the sale of that subcategory of software.

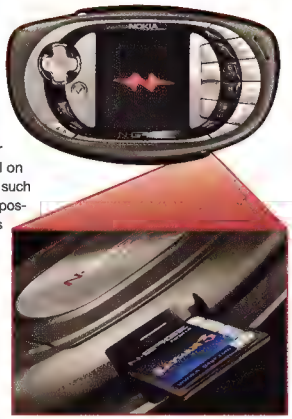
According to the antiviolence website Join Together Online, the New York City Council held a hearing in the spring at which Councilwoman Gail Brewer proposed a bill that would set a $1500 fine for merchants who sell violent games to minors. Councilman Eric Gioia further proposed a separate section in stores for violent titles. The hearing included the viewing of footage from GTA: Vice City. "I wasn't even aware that this filth existed," said Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. GTA: Vice City's publisher, Rockstar, is headquartered in New York City; it is widely understood among gamers that Grand Theft Auto III's Liberty City is at least inspired by the Big Apple, if not overtly based on it.

On the opposite side of the country, San Francisco–based Assemblyman Leland Yee introduced nearly identical bills for the state of California. The bills have received strong opposition from retailers, game publishers, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). On the flip side, the California Psychiatric Association supported the bills so strongly that it provided a form letter for its members to download, sign, and send in (noting that personal elaboration and rewriting was encouraged because "we don't want legislators to feel they are receiving form letters").

In both cases, an active parental role was offered as a nonlegal solution to the problem. In a statement regarding the California bills, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) said "Parents are the gatekeepers when it comes to deciding what games are brought into their homes....substituting the government's judgment for parental supervision, and turning retailers into surrogate parents, as this bill would do, is the wrong approach."

Visit GamePro.com for updated news on these important legal showdowns.

Nokia's N-Gage QD



As Nokia's first mix of cell phone and game machine, the poorly designed N-Gage has endured its share of ridicule and growing pains. But don't count the company out yet—a redesigned N-Gage is en route that Nokia hopes will give its concept a second chance.

The new model, the N-Gage QD, features longer battery life, improved controls (notably, a redesigned directional pad), a brighter screen, and a new N-Gage Arena launcher application preinstalled on the console. The unit also incorporates advanced smartphone features, such as personal information management, XHTML browser, e-mail, and the possibility to download and install additional Series 60 applications. Games can now be inserted into the handheld without taking off the back lid, and users will no longer need to talk from the side of the phone.

"After six months on the market with the N-Gage platform, we wanted to expand our device portfolio based on the feedback we've received," said Nokia Senior Vice President of Games Ilkka Raiskinen. "With improved gaming ergonomics, gamers can now start to play games at the push of a button and enjoy the increased responsiveness of the game keys. We also added support for hot-swap MMC and extended the battery life. For phone calls, we reoriented the speaker and microphone to support 'classic talking.'"

Although prices had not been set in stone at press time, Nokia has stated that the handheld will sell for $99 with a phone contract and $199 as a stand-alone. The GSM 850/1900 version of the N-Gage QD is slated for release in June.

New SF Action Figs!

SOTA Toys made a splash with its Lara Croft wet suit action figure; now it's celebrating the 15th anniversary of Street Fighter with an all-new line of posables. Each figure features at least 30 points of articulation (!) as well as alternate heads and swappable hands for different moods and poses. You should see Bison, Ryu, Chun Li, Sodom, and Sagat show up in stores around July or August for $12.99 each; the second wave will hit retailers closer to Halloween. For more info, visit sotatoys.com.

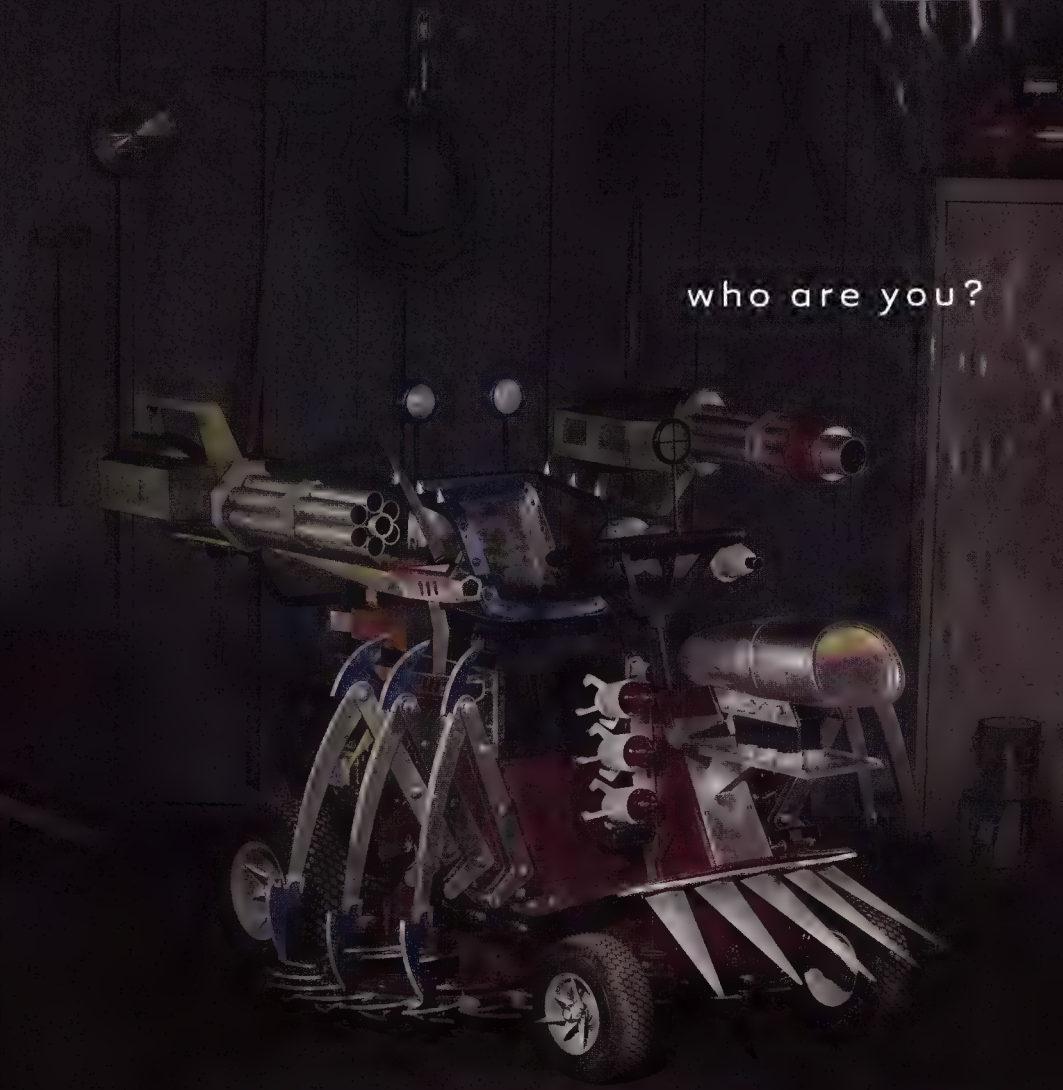
Metroid Movie—Woo!
Put another item from gamers' movie wish lists from the "Someday" column over to "Soon"—action director John Woo (*Face/Off*) has optioned the rights to Metroid and will co-produce the feature film version with the choice to direct. "This type of story has a proven track record of success with audiences," he said to the *Hollywood Reporter*. It's believed that the film will focus on Samus Aran's beginnings with plenty of involvement from Metroids and Mother Brain. The movie might appear as early as next Christmas. Here's hoping it turns out to be cool; they're already talking franchise. Woo is apparently serious about games, having recently established his own software development studio, Tiger Hill.

Silicon Knights Goes Solo
Canadian developer Silicon Knights has announced that it has ended its second-party exclusive development agreement with Nintendo. Known for creating GameCube titles like Eternal Darkness and Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes, the company will be working on other platforms but doesn't rule out the possibility of creating future GameCube titles. The developer has given no official reason for its break from Nintendo.

Nvidia's GeForce 6
Nvidia has announced its GeForce 6 series of video cards, led by the GeForce 6800 Ultra and the slightly more affordable GeForce 6800. Aside from reverting back to a number scheme (and skipping the number five because of the FX series) the GeForce 6 cards will feature up to 16 pipelines—twice the amount of the GeForce FX 5950 or ATI 9800XT, enabling the card to process more information at once. The series will feature Direct X 9.0 Shader Model 3.0 for enhanced cinematic effects with a 400 MHz GPU clock and a 550 MHz memory clock.

The GeForce 6 series cards are manufactured using IBM's high-volume 0.13-micron process technology and are currently shipping to major add-in card partners and system builders, including Alienware, ASUS, Acer, PNY, HP, and NEC. Nvidia has stated that the card will be available at retailers across the U.S. by June. PNY has already announced its own GeForce 6800 Ultra, which will be available at retailers for $499.

who are you?



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GamePro Labs

Datel GameTalk

Xbox
Rating: 4.0

Sooner or later, that Xbox Live headset is going to wear out or break or get lost—or some combination thereof. When it's time for that replacement, give Datel's GameTalk a try, especially if you're not a fan of Microsoft's slung-back headphone design. The GameTalk features a traditional over-the-head earpiece design, but the grip of the plastic band could be a bit more snug. The flexible microphone and padded earpiece are nice, but the best perk of this package is the second headset. Now when you and a friend share the couch and team up together on the Internet, you can both chime in on the conversation, using only one Xbox Live account and connection. It's also less expensive than Microsoft's Communicator headset. Worth a look!—*Dan Elektro*

Price: $24.99. Contact: Datel, 727/431-0650, codejunkies.com

Intromark Digiglove

Rating: 1.5

In gaming, ergonomics is king. The controller is where your physical reality translates to virtual reality, and the link is quite possibly the most important aspect of any game. That's a fancy way of saying, "Don't wear gloves while you play games," even if those gloves happen to be Digigloves. While the polyester/polyurethane finger condoms do feature padding for your thumb and index finger (the other three fingers are—gasp!—naked), they destroy that crucial sense of connection between you and your onscreen persona. In a game of THUG, the bulky thumb stitching kept bumping into the right analog stick, knocking the camera out of whack with every ollie. The idea of a padded gaming glove makes sense in theory but not in practice. Gamers will be better off risking blisters than trying to adjust their natural play styles while wearing Digigloves.—*Bad Hare*

Price: $13.95. Contact: Intromark, 800/851-6030

Best-Selling Video-Game Titles: March 2004

	TITLE	PLATFORM	PUBLISHER
1	Ninja Gaiden	Xbox	Tecmo
2	Pokémon Colosseum	GameCube	Nintendo
3	MVP Baseball 2004	PlayStation 2	EA Sports
4	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow	Xbox	Ubisoft
5	MVP Baseball 2004	Xbox	EA Sports
6	James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	PlayStation 2	EA Games
7	Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	GameCube	Konami
8	Final Fantasy XI w/HDD	PlayStation 2	Sony
9	Resident Evil: Outbreak	PlayStation 2	Sony
10	MX Unleashed	PlayStation 2	THQ

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld

Static

Championship 2... Unreal Championship 2... Microsoft cancelled its own line of sports games for the Xbox this year. Haters took that as a sign of weakness, but it might be strategic. Rumors suggest that EA and Microsoft are seeking an agreement to bring EA Sports franchises to Live. Could MS be taking a year off to give EA the full spotlight this holiday? Don't be surprised if, by the time you read this, Madden's wearing a Communicator headset. • Never go to the movies with Miss Spell. You never know when she's going to pull game controllers and a camera out of her purse and make it into a 10-to-1-feature background. • Researchers say that video games give surgeons better hand-eye coordination for performing tricky operations. Best quote, from Dr. James "Butch" Rosser: "Super Monkey Ball is a nice, wholesome game. No blood and guts. But I need the same kind of skill to go into a body and sew two pieces of intestine together." Now *there's* a mini-game Sega left out. • Yes, ladies, the rumors are true—Major Mike is officially off the market. *GamePro*'s most eligible amphibious bachelor tied the knot in May and managed to keep his relationship a secret for nine months. With stealth like that, Solid Snake would be proud. • Speaking of family business, congrats to Air Hendrix, who created the ultimate over-the-top excuse to get out of going to E3 this year—a beautiful baby girl. She entered the world flailing her arms wildly, just like her dad. • Have you seen *Gamestar*? It's cool. Check your newsstand. • Resident Evil 4... Resident Ev

Internal Combustion

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What? You want me to?
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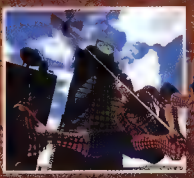

Web swing for the first time from street to rooftop across the entire city.

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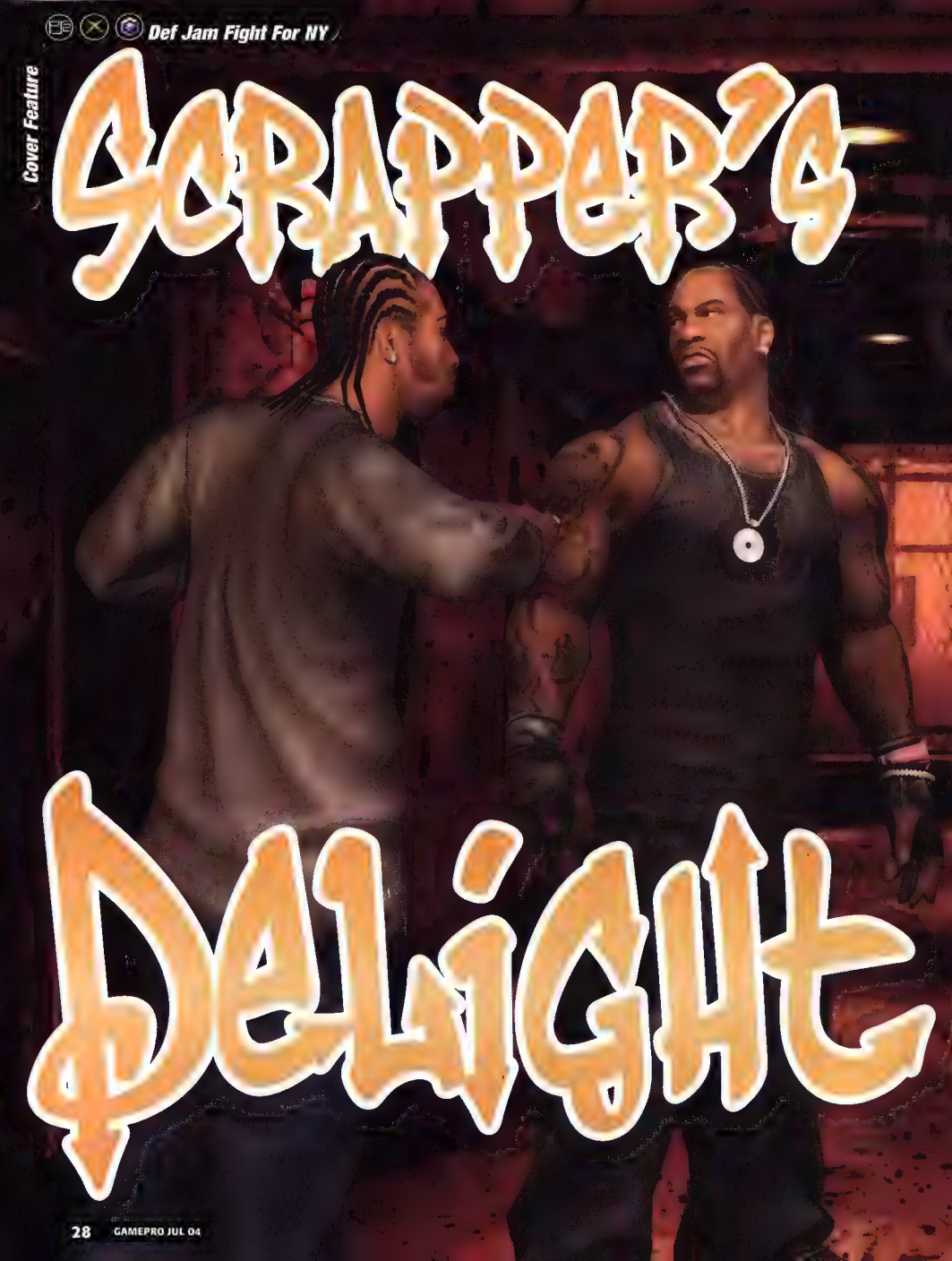
Scrapper's Delight



Packed with hip-hop celebrities and urban attitude, Def Jam Fight For NY is far more than just WWE Street. By D-Pad Destroyer

The best wrestling game in recent memory isn't even, strictly speaking, a wrestling game. Last year's Def Jam Vendetta took AKI's best-ever wrestling engine, combined it with Def Jam recording artists and their music, and, oddly enough, ended up as an ultimately playable and cool brawler with a real, innovative edge. This year, developers AKI and EA Canada are throwing in more of what the fans (and the rappers) wanted as they lovingly craft Def Jam Fight For NY.

Jam On It

Josh Holmes, EA Canada's producer for Fight For NY, heard your cries and complaints about last year's game. As good as that game was, it definitely had some shortcomings. Vendetta's developers themselves had one big pet peeve: the ring. "We had some really cool environments in the last game, but they were always just pretty backdrops behind the ring," says Holmes. "People wanted to get out and use the environments to their advantage. The Def Jam world just felt better suited to a true street fighting experience, so that's what we set out to create." Fight For NY's venues range from subway platforms and boxing rings to *Fight Club*–like pit-fights and burning warehouses with ever-encroaching flames. All environments have interactive objects (including weapons), crowds that grab your guy and push him back into the fight, and breakable lamps perfect for receiving your opponent's soft, fleshy forehead. These interactive arenas take the focus off the squared circle and place it firmly on brutal, badass brawling.

Besides the need for more interactive venues, Vendetta's other big weakness was its lack of a Create-a-Fighter mode. This year, you'll be able to create your own fighter from the get-go by talking to a sketch artist early in the game. By answering the artist's questions, you'll eventually come up with a fighter who looks like you'd expect. With that done, you'll then head into the Gym where Henry Rollins (yes, *the* Henry Rollins) waits to whip you into shape and let you choose your fighting style. From then on your character, down to his hairstyles, tattoos, outfits, and jewelry, is yours to customize as you see fit. Much, much better than last year's choice between Fast Guy, Strong Guy, or Balanced Guy.

No Spandex Allowed

Def Jam Vendetta's desperation to be considered anything *other* than a wrestling game didn't change the fact that that's essentially what it was. Fight For NY is working hard to shed that moniker. "The first time you see the over-the-top finishing moves," says Holmes, "you'll realize that this is about the

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Fighting With Style

"Fighting styles in our game are more like general fighting classes," says Producer Josh Holmes. Each style consists of a bunch of moves, including signature finishing moves and special knock-out attacks.

Martial Artists Martial artists rely on quick strikes and counter-attacks, and they're very strong on defense. They can use the environment for powerful flying attacks, which they may use to KO an opponent.

Kickboxing Kickboxers depend on kicks and kicking attacks, but they may tie up opponents in a clinch and throw kick, punch, and elbow combos. If they manage to land these combos, they can KO the foe with a haymaker at the end.

Submissions A submissions expert works on specific parts of the body and tries to get his foe to give up. By locking up and breaking parts of a foe's body, a submissions expert can tie up an opponent in a submission hold and make him tap out.

Street Fighting Street fighters are brawlers through and through. They rely on brutal punches and punch combos, along with a few less technical throws. Street fighters can KO opponents with a haymaker punch, which they can throw at any time.

Wrestling Wrestlers are the masters of throws and holds, but their strikes are slower than anyone else's. It takes tons of damage to bring one down, and a wrestler can KO an opponent with a front or rear hard grappling move.

farthest you can get from sweaty men in tights. But there's more to the new game than just big finishing moves. The biggest addition to the way the game plays this year is the concept of individual fighting styles, which give you all sorts of ways to customize your character. You'll choose one primary and two secondary styles for your fighter, and learn moves from those styles exclusively, giving fights an element of skill and diversity that most other wrestling games can't match.

The five fighting styles enable a certain amount of customization for your fighter while also encouraging replayability and bringing some RPG elements into the mix. "We wanted to create a system that was RPG-inspired and required users to make choices about the type of fighter they wanted to create," says Holmes. "The system we designed allows for a lot of growth and customization without being overly complex." As your character develops, you'll head into the gym to train, learn new moves and styles, and build up your character's abilities. Thankfully, points used to upgrade your character's fighting prowess are separate from the ones used to buy unlockables like jewelry and clothing; you no longer have to choose whether your fighter will look good or fight well.

The 4-1-1

While brawling games are all about multiplayer (and FFNY is no slouch in that department), Vendetta's single-player game left a little to be desired. Concerned that last year's game was too linear, the developers have set out to make a much more open single-player mode this time around. Not only will Story mode be three times longer and have six times more story content than last year's, but it will also feature branches based on your performance and character choices that should make the game ever more replayable.

As Vendetta fans may know, D-Mob (the evil leader of the underground fighting scene) has been arrested in connection with a shooting at the final match of that game. On the way to jail, however, D-Mob escapes with the help of a shadowy figure. You begin the game as one of D-Mob's fighters, charged with helping the crime lord regain his territory from the even-more-sinister Crow (whom you may recognize as Snoop Dogg himself).

As you fight through the game, you face down characters featuring the voices and likenesses of famous Def Jam artists, such as Redman, Ludacris, Busta Rhymes, and more, along with other recognizable faces like Carmen Elektra and Danny Trejo (trust us, you'll know him when you see him). Even your character's best friend, Blaze, is played by Wu Tang's Method Man. Interspersed among the celebrities are a number of characters created just for this game, including a few that Vendetta vets will recognize from last year's title.

King of Bling

You can't make a hip-hop inspired game without bringing along the clothes and the attitude of urban culture. Even the rappers involved in the game were clear on this, says Holmes: "They wanted to wear real authentic branded gear, and, of course, they all wanted their jewelry to sparkle and shine." You'll win money for fighting in Fight For NY, which you'll then be able to take to various shops to exchange for stuff. You'll be able to shop for authentic-label clothing, buy jewelry sold by famous designer Jacob the Jeweler, head to a barber shop to get yourself groomed right, and hit up Manny (the "best friend" from Vendetta) for a sweet tattoo. You'll even have access to the trafficker, a character who enables you to trade unlockables in true Animal Crossing fashion to get the clothes and bling you might never find otherwise.

Clothing and jewelry aren't just for show, either. Each article of clothing and jewelry will give you a certain bonus to Charisma, making it easier for you to gain momentum during a fight. You better think it through, though.

because the more you fight in a particular outfit, the more its bonus fades, until you change your clothes. You'll need a huge wardrobe of outfits if you want to win, encouraging you to spend your hard-earned bucks on threads without having a ludicrous DOAX-like outfit inflation in which the best clothes cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Mo' Money

While last year's Def Jam was one of the best brawlers in recent times, Fight For NY aims to add depth and power to the game while expanding its celebrity profile. Considering that the formula of Def Jam plus brutal streetfighting was a success last time, Vendetta's sequel will definitely be worth watching when it ships this fall.

Leggo My Ego

EA is used to working with famous people for its games, but hip-hop stars are notorious for their attitude and image. What's it like working with some of the most famous rappers in the industry?

Producer Josh Holmes headed up all of the studio sessions with the stars. "Everyone was a joy to work with," he says, "so it's really hard to single people out." Holmes says that Method Man was awesome because "he's someone who really cares passionately about whatever he's creating, and being an avid gamer, he really understands what goes into making a game great." Redman, on the other hand, made things interesting during the recording sessions. "At the time, we still weren't sure whether the game was going to be Mature or Teen, so I kept asking him to give me a clean version of his lines, and every time he'd double the amount of profanity."

In fact, it seems like Holmes had a great time with everyone involved. "The Southern guys were all great. Ludacris, Scarface, Bonecrusher, David Banner, Bubba Sparxxx, Lil' Flip, and FamLay—they were some of the most polite and cooperative people we worked with. [And] Lil' Kim was a total sweetheart. I had heard so many stories about her being a diva, so I was a little intimidated to finally meet her, but she was a total pro—and absolutely gorgeous in person."

RETURN of the SITH

Always two there are, according to Yoda. Knights of the Old Republic may be the master, but its sequel, The Sith Lords, looks like more than just an apprentice. BY DUNJIN MASTER

Knights of the Old Republic was a revolution: It was a bridge between U.S.-style PC and Japanese console RPGs, and it sold tons of copies while gathering a snowball of critical and gamer acclaim. BioWare's epic brought real Star Wars drama to the Jar-Jar generation and reminded us how cool Star Wars could be. How difficult must it be, then, for a newly formed developer to step into BioWare's shoes and deliver a sequel that's even a fraction as awesome as the original?

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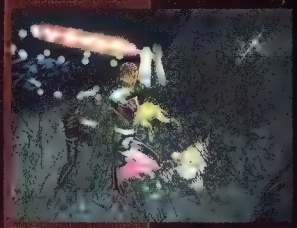
THE WILL OF THE COUNCIL

Obsidian Entertainment may be a young company, but it's not entirely new. It was founded in 2003 by a gang of guys whose names ought to be on every PC RPG fan's thank-you list: Feargus Urquhart, Chris Parker, Darren Monahan, Chris Avellone, and Chris Jones. As veterans of Interplay's dearly departed Black Isle label, this Fantastic Four worked on pretty much every formative RPG in recent years. If you had to name a dream team to follow BioWare's work on KOTOR, you couldn't do much better than this.

For The Sith Lords, Obsidian has access to BioWare's original engine and tools as well as the rich background and themes created for this even longer time ago. This is a situation the Obsidian team has been in before; all five of the founders worked on Planescape: Torment, and all but Jones were on Icewind Dale. Both games were new games based on technology pioneered by BioWare's Baldur's Gate.



But aside from the technology and the overall feel of the game (it's still an RPG with Force powers, inventory, and that same 4000-years-before-*A-New-Hope* setting), Obsidian is setting out to make a mark on the title. Chris Parker, The Sith Lords' producer, says, "I wanted to keep playing [KOTOR], and when it was done, I was incredibly happy that I had played it. Any really great game is like that. That's what we want The Sith Lords to leave you with."

EPISODE 0.5

Mike Gallo, LucasArts' producer for Sith, describes the story: "It is the twilight of the Jedi. The Jedi Order, nearly brought to an end by the Sith in [KOTOR], have scattered, vanishing into the deepest reaches of space. As Republic forces have receded from the fringe, the remnants of the Sith have begun to prey on the unprotected worlds. These Sith assassins, led by a vicious Sith Lord, are hunting one they believe to be the last of the Jedi, a disgraced veteran of the Mandalorian War who holds the key to the fate of the Jedi Order and the Sith."

This dark story seems right to follow the events of the original, but what made KOTOR extra cool was the ability to play it as either a virtuous hero or a conqueror of worlds. Usually when someone makes a sequel to a game with multiple contradictory endings, the sequel has to choose one ending to build from. In the case of The Sith Lords, however, the events that came before the game starts are as up to the player as they were in the original.

"We originally planned on scanning the hardware to see if there was a KOTOR game and how it ended," Parker explains, "but this really left too many questions open: What if they played it more than once? Which save do we use? Ultimately, we decided to let the player tell us how KOTOR ended and then use their responses as our data." Lead Designer Chris Avellone elaborates: "In conversations with

CONTINUED ▶

HUNTER FOR HIRE

Who among you KOTOR veterans can forget the well-defined characters in that game? Do you remember the introspective, preachy, but conflicted Bastila, the loyal Zaalbar, and the gleefully cruel HK-47? The Sith Lords will feature some familiar faces, but most of the characters will be new.

One of these new characters is Mira, a bounty hunter with an arsenal of destructive weapons and a moral code that forbids her to kill but for self-defense. While she searches the galaxy for her bounties to fulfill her mercenary need for cash, she keeps away from contract killings and contracts with the Exchange, a powerful criminal underground organization.

But Mira's not all heart. Her favorite weapon is a bounty hunter–specific one: a wrist-mounted rocket launcher that enables her to fire knockout darts for nonlethal take-downs or buster and ion rockets for when life is on the line.

And the best part? Mira's on your side—at least, as far as we know.

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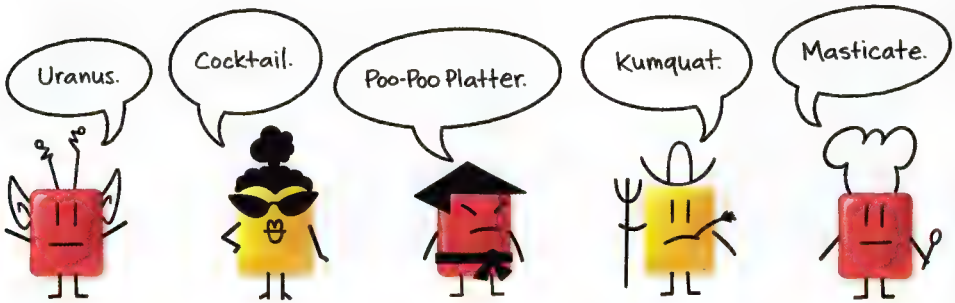

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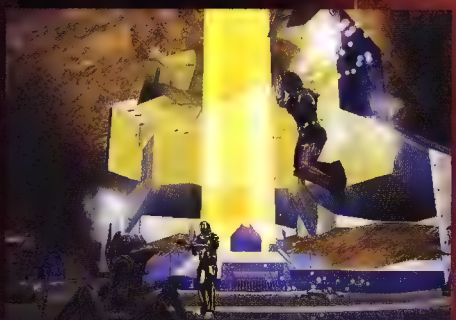
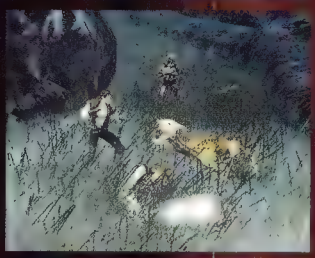
various characters in the early stages of the game, the player can say how the first game ended, and the sequel will take that into account from then on." So when you play The Sith Lords, *you* decide how the previous story ended, and the game makes the appropriate changes from there. Yet *another* reason to replay a game that, if it's anything like its original, will likely be highly replayable to begin with.

Because The Sith Lords' story takes place only a few years after the events in KOTOR, things still won't encroach on George Lucas's current Star Wars saga. "We felt the direction BioWare chose with Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic was a good one: to provide a cinematic experience in the Star Wars universe using fresh faces that longtime Star Wars fans and game players could relate with," says Avellone. "We've chosen to do the same in The Sith Lords with a new cast of characters to keep the game fresh and interesting." A few familiar faces will appear here and there, says Obsidian, but not too many. Plus, Avellone adds, ominously, "We wanted to respect the choices players made in the first game, and as a result, some characters are simply not available to the player." Those of you who played the Dark Side path in KOTOR know which ones those are.

On top of that, The Sith Lords will hinge on your decisions to an even greater extent than in KOTOR. "The result of the player's choices will have a broader range of effects than in the first game," says Avellone. "The player will find that as he tends toward the Light Side or Dark Side, there will be greater ramifications within the game itself."





Flowing Through You

What's a Star Wars game without Jedi powers? In The Sith Lords, the Jedi are scattered, but the game's Force powers will be even more robust than in KOTOR. Obsidian has kept all of the Force powers from the original game, but they've also added new ones that they feel will expand gameplay. One new power is Force Sight, which enables you to see a character's aura and tell whether they're Light, Dark, or Neutral by the color of the glow around them. The old powers will all be getting a facelift as well, so those of you who were fond of Force Choke will have something new to look at while you're executing Sith soldiers.

Alongside the powers, the interface will also receive an upgrade. Experienced with putting new polish on existing technology, Obsidian will focus the same minds that built Planescape: Torment from Baldur's Gate on making sure that the good stays in KOTOR while the annoying bits hit the road. The developers have listened to tons of player feedback, and they've made a list of things that need improvement. The plan is to change or eliminate aggravating things (like having to enter the inventory to change between your pistol and your lightsaber) without killing off the depth everyone appreciated in the original.

A New Hope

To many people, the idea of simply having more KOTOR is enough to get them calling in a preorder before the February 2005 release. Knowing that the followup to BioWare's masterpiece is in the hands of developers who made some of the best RPGs of all time puts to rest nearly any concerns over the quality of the game. Still, Obsidian isn't taking anything for granted. "We'd be foolish to have no concerns about creating the sequel for such a great game," says Parker, "but, at least for me, it's no different from creating something from scratch. You have the same goals and expectations, and with those you have the same concerns."

Well, no pressure, guys, but everyone is watching you. Time to put Obsidian squarely on the map.

Volcanic Glass

When Interplay killed off Black Isle Studios, RPGers everywhere felt a disturbance in the Force. The folks who brought us Fallout, Planescape: Torment, Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance, and more had suddenly been silenced. Obsidian Entertainment may be a young developer, but it is also a sigh of relief for anyone serious about RPGs.

LucasArts' Sith Lords Producer Mike Gallo says, "The founders of Obsidian Entertainment alone bring experience from Fallout, Fallout 2, the entire Baldur's Gate series, Planescape: Torment, Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance I and II, Arcanum, and the entire Icewind Dale series." That's quite a pedigree there. These are folks known for RPG excellence and whose faces should adorn the walls of the gaming genius hall of fame.

"We founded Obsidian to make the best RPGs and other games that we could," says Obsidian President Feargus Urquhart. "We felt that we certainly had the experience on the PC side but also on the console side with what we added to Snowblind's Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance. Earlier in our careers, we had a fair amount of experience working on consoles like the SNES and PlayStation, and working with developers like Blizzard when they were known as Silicon and Synapse, and, briefly, as Chaos."

And where will they go next? "I can't really speak to the 'destiny' of Obsidian Entertainment," says Producer Chris Parker. "We really like making role-playing games, but I'd like to think that doesn't box us into solely paper-and-pencil–type RPGs. I know that a number of us would like to do an RPG-lite, atmosphere-heavy game like System Shock 2 (that game rocked). But we'd also like to build completely new worlds and hardcore systems."

Obsidian knows that all eyes will be on it with The Sith Lords, but it is feeling excitement more than panic. "All I can say," says Parker, "is that if you don't try jumping, you'll never know how high you can get. We only want to make the very best games, so here we are—this is exactly what we want to be doing."

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With one of the deepest customization modes ever designed, a unique Respect-building system, and wild team-based racing, Juiced may fly by the competition in the street racing field. BY IRON MONKEY

SPEED AND GREED

Though its origins trace back to Depression-era races along Southern California riverbeds in vintage Fords and Chevies, street racing has really only seeped into the collective mainstream psyche over the past couple of years. Despite incredible racing sequences, Hollywood fare like *The Fast and the Furious* relegated the culture surrounding street racing to glitzy window dressing. So it has fallen to video games to transmit the thrill of underground racing and the communities built around it to audiences. With the success of Need for Speed Underground, the street racing subgenre has finally caught on with gamers, and now a NFSU sequel, along with Namco's Street Racing Syndicate, are in the works. The proverbial dice have been thrown.

But coming in under the radar, Juiced, the brainchild of newcomer Juice Games, could be the most promising representation of the very dangerous and very illegal sport yet. Featuring licensed cars from more than 50 manufacturers, including Honda, Fiat, Nissan, and Mitsubishi, Juiced will hurl young, hungry speed geeks into nocturnal races for wealth, fame, and the immediate, unrestrained rush of thundering between darkened buildings and through deserted city streets. Between races, you use earnings and respect to buy and customize cars, contact other racers to participate in events, and—unlike in other genre entries—build a team that you control during races.

FROM OUT OF THE ASHES

Formed in 2003, Juice Games is populated by refugee designers, programmers, and artists from developer Rage Games. Its ambitious project entitled Lamborghini was to be Xbox Live's first racer before production got scrapped and the studio shut down. Now independent, members of the team regrouped and restrategized, hell bent on not only making a great game but also on progressing the racing genre as a whole. "At Juice, we set ambitious goals for ourselves, which we are able to achieve due to our experience and our ability to overcome technical and creative challenges," says Don Whiteford of Juice Games. "Juice Games is the first time that we have been able to express ourselves through our own company." Thus, Juiced is the first offering under the new moniker and will introduce never-before-seen, yet entirely logical, elements to the racing genre.

Just as precious a game currency as dollars, "respect in Juiced earns you the right to attend, bet on, and organize races, and is necessary to recruit racers to your team. How you gain respect varies from event to event. Some crews respect how you build your car or how well you perform stunts like drifts and donuts, while others are impressed by your team skills or your betting acumen. Gain enough respect, and other crews will call you on a mobile phone to offer circuit, point-to-point, drift, and drag challenges. But watch out—drive recklessly and damage opponents' cars, and not only will you have to foot the repair bills, but the racing community will also get wind of your behavior and ban you from events, adding another layer of realism to the whole experience.

BETTER THAN YOU CREW

By far, Juiced's coolest feature is its team-based races. When you begin Juiced, you race solo, but earn enough cash and respect, and you can recruit other racers to join your crew. Building a team is a slow process as you have to actually train members by entering them in races. But once you have your group in place, you can enter team races, introducing a destined-to-be-imitated tactical element to the genre as you can control up to two members during the event.

Before a race, you pick the best members of your team and assign them cars tailored toward the type of event and the opposing crew's reputation. During a race, an onscreen HUD shows which driver you are controlling and his current level of aggression, which in turn is determined by a combination of how well your drivers are trained and how stress affects them. "On the highest aggression setting, the drivers will use NOS if available, drive the fastest, and take risks in overtaking and cornering. They may also collide with opponents' cars in their haste to get ahead," explains Whiteford. Drivers with lower levels, of course, tend to keep a steady pace and not take risks, which can be used to your strategic advantage. Though online support wasn't yet implemented in the build we played, team members will be able to communicate and coordinate strategies via headset over Xbox Live.

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IT'S A MOD, MOD, MOD, MOD WORLD

To the burgeoning throngs of carhacking racers, modifying a car using domestic and imported aftermarket parts is a unique form of expression; it marries a raw obsession for speed with the application of technical wizardry that enables the owner to create a mechanically aesthetic statement of individuality. No longer the sole domain of auto enthusiasts, according to Whiteford, "modding has become a means for the young and streetwise to express their passion and creativity through car customization." Realizing the appeal of modding and successfully translating gamers is one of the core goals of the team.

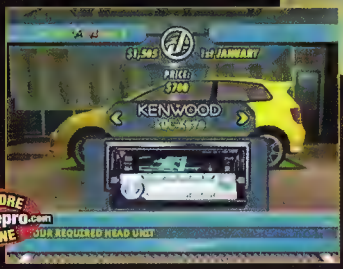
In Juiced, cosmetic modifications like bodywork, paintjobs, neon, and tints provide eye-candy thrills, while performance upgrades to your racer's suspension, air intake, exhausts, and wheels will affect its handling. After making mods, you'll want to test your car's performance on a rolling road as the tuning system developed by the team is so deep that haphazardly buying upgrades can hurt your chances in races. Skillful upgrades can qualify your car for more lucrative higher-class races, but overtune it, and you'll wind up as a bottom feeder in a higher class and get creamed.

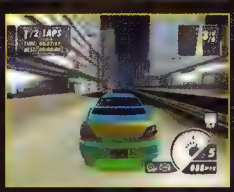
It's this attention to detail that gives Juiced a depth that previous street racing games haven't quite achieved. "Given our unique customization features of the game, there will be thousands of possible vehicles to take on the road and online," says Whiteford. "The odds of seeing someone with the same car are virtually impossible." Juice Games is focusing so much attention on between-race modding, in fact, that you can get so caught up in the intricacies of building, testing, and perfecting cars, and easily forget that underneath it all is a scrupulously designed racing game. And that's exactly the type of cultural immersion Juice Games is gunning for.

Juiced is also the first of a new breed of games that allow officially licensed cars to suffer damage. Up until now, manufacturers have been resistant to let their products get wrecked in games, but Whiteford says they are starting to understand that damage is an integral feature of any game. "We still have to be careful of how we portray damage; we cannot destroy the passenger compartment, roll the car totally, or make it a write-off," explains Whiteford. "We can bruise it up badly, however, to the point where you'll be sorry you didn't drive more skillfully." Though you cannot completely destroy a car, the game's damage system does enable you to bang up the major body panels, while parts like fenders, spoilers, and skirts can fall off and form debris that can damage other cars that run into them.

ROLLING ROAD TEST

For all its peripheral features, Juiced is at its core a solid racer, and the playable build we're testing boasts a driving system that beautifully balances the nuances of Gran Turismo–like simulation with the immediate rush of NFSU arcade-style racing. The tactical team aspect is challenging yet intuitive, and you'd think controlling crew members would be more difficult at speeds over 100 mph, but it works great. Juice Games is still working on fine-tuning the game and tweaking opponent A.I., but come September, this little-hyped outing could be the harbinger of much-needed innovation in the racing genre.





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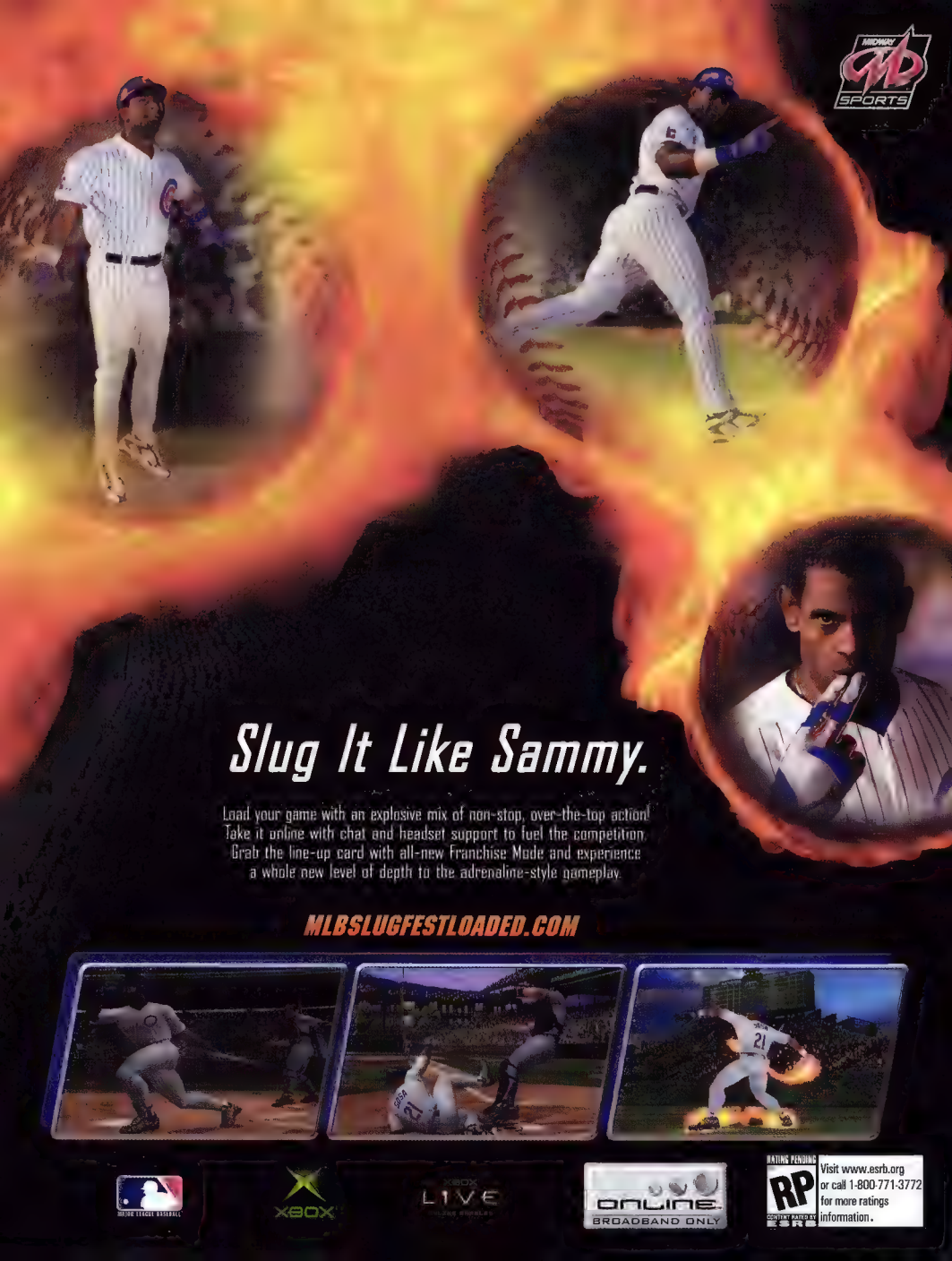
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First Fantasy

Ah, so that's what drums in the deep.

EA preps The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age—a role-playing game based on movies that were based on books that inspired almost every role-playing game ever made.

BY STAR DINGO

From first-edition Dungeons & Dragons to the persistent online universe of World of Warcraft, the whole role-playing kingdom owes its fair share to the words of Tolkien and the elves, dwarves, and orcs of Middle-earth. That's why EA's latest game shouldn't come as much of a surprise—a role-playing saga based on its *The Lord of the Rings* movie license. Eventually, everything comes full circle.

The Deep Places of the World

In The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age (still a working title), you "follow in the footsteps of the Fellowship," fighting your way through (and parallel to) the events of *The Lord of the Rings* as a party of heroes you create. As in BioWare's influential Knights of the Old Republic, you'll be able to choose which side you're on—good or evil—as well as craft your own characters from the races of Middle-earth.

Character creation, inventory and quest management, and skill selection will all be familiar to anyone who's played an RPG before—you begin by choosing from the races of Middle-earth and then build your stats and skills as you gain experience. EA describes the gameplay as free-roaming with side-quests and both scripted and random encounters, utilizing a user-controlled camera so you can view a scene from any angle (no locked camera a la Final Fantasy X or even EA's other trilogy-based action games). The turn-based battle system allows you to ride mounts (horses or wargs, depending on your path) and use leadership skills to coax the best out of your party.

Not All Who Wander Are Lost

The Third Age is being crafted for the PS2, Xbox, and GameCube by EA's Redwood Shores development house, the same folks who brought us highbrow hack-n-smackers The Two Towers and The Return of the King. "We've been thinking about building an RPG for the Lord of the Rings since we started on The Two Towers," says Executive Producer Steve Gray, an RPG and Tolkien vet who worked on EA's previous LOTR games as well as Square RPGs, including Parasite Eve. "Serious development didn't start until we were into building The Return of the King…and honestly, I've been talking about building a Lord of the Rings RPG for at least 10 years—I just never had the chance to do it until now."

While The Third Age is definitely about making your own story during the War of the Ring, the tale will often intersect with the events of the trilogy. "You will definitely experience the pivotal moments from the films," says Gray. "Two good examples are the fight with the Balrog in Khazad Dum and the encounter between Eowyn, Merry, and the Witch King on the Pelennor Fields."

Depending on whether you choose to fight for light or shadow, you'll fight with or against Aragorn, Gandalf, and all sorts of other heroes from the movies, complete with their likenesses. And while the trilogy's story will remain fundamentally the same, "you can win individual encounters as either good or evil," says Gray. "As in any game, you can influence the events. It wouldn't be very much fun if you always win!"

To make the game feel like the movie, EA is once again getting the full support of New Line Cinema, so you can expect the same sort of authentic-to-the-film look and sound that you got in the Two Towers and Return of the King games. "We're using voice-over from the film actors as well as motion capture data from the stunt doubles used in the films for our fighting animations," says Gray. "As with our previous Lord of the Rings games, there's a strong partnership with New Line so that we start with the same 'blueprint' of Middle-earth from an asset standpoint."

"The Lord of the Rings is the quintessential RPG story," says Executive Producer Steve Gray. "It's a perfect fit."

EA's new RPG The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age lets you play scenes from Jackson's movies for good or for ill.

The game features a turn-based combat system that will be familiar to RPG players.

Tricksy Things

Despite the wealth of material to work with, crafting a Lord of the Rings game based on Peter Jackson films could actually prove to be more difficult than it sounds as EA isn't technically allowed to delve into Tolkien's notes, books, or other writings about Middle-earth (Vivendi Universal holds the book rights). "Our rights flow from the films," says Gray, "so our game revolves around events—both major and minor—depicted in all three films…Khazad Dum, Helm's Deep, Osgiliath, Minas Tirith. We aren't going to change the story—why would we try to second guess Tolkien? However, we are going to show you more of the world that Peter Jackson envisioned."

As your character advances, you progress along a skill tree not unlike in EA's other LOTR games. Is it too much to ask for a dwarf-tossing combo attack?

No, that's not Faramir—but the character-creation system lets you make someone who looks like him.

Book rights versus film rights may seem like a technicality, but it's one that definitely affects the content. In order to make a game that doesn't feel restricted, the team is expanding on a lot of underplayed territory—areas like the White Mountains Plains (the White Mountains stretch from Minas Tirith westward almost to the sea and contain Helm's Deep and the Paths of the Dead).

It's a Dangerous Business Going Out Your Front Door

While the potential is huge, the possibilities are more limited than usual—so here's hoping that EA can craft a good, compelling, open-ended-enough RPG out of Jackson's celluloid vision without stepping on too many literary toes. Even for a company like EA, The One Ring can be a heavy burden to bear.

STARRING

THE WORST MOVIE GAMES EVER

Hooray, it's summer blockbuster season! But when it comes to the bad games based on Hollywood movies, there's really only one question: How can you pick just 10?

By Alan Smithee

10. Friday the 13th LJN for the NES

From the startup screen—Jason's hockey mask sitting alone in the dark, until a knife flies in from above to pierce the empty eye socket—Friday the 13th looks like it will live up to its gory namesake. Unfortunately, what follows is a repetitive music score and amazingly frustrating gameplay courtesy of LJN (one of Acclaim's early brand names). You control six hapless teenage counselors at Camp Crystal Lake whose sole purpose seems to be to find where Jason is lurking, go there, and get killed. Well, technically, you can try to throw rocks at him (and an axe, which appears randomly), but whether you're armed with a machete or a sweater (not kidding), he still whales away at you, bobbing and weaving as if the game was Jason Voorhees' Punch-Out!! In theory, you can survive three days, killing ever-stronger Jasons every day (not to mention battling his mother's disembodied head). When all six camp counselors are dead, you win. Well, not really—that's a house rule, but at least the game ends.

9. Minority Report Activision for the PS2, Xbox, and GameCube

Philip K. Dick's sci-fi stories had been co-opted for cinematic use before—the breath-taking *Blade Runner* and the accidentally funny *Total Recall*—so *Minority Report*'s non-stop, action-packed cerebral mystery seemed like prime movie fodder. Unfortunately, the movie's slick "everybody runs" tag line was interpreted as "everybody runs around in a 3D Final Fight–style brain-dead brawler" for the consoles. Sluggish controls, poor camera work, unbalanced weapons, the player character's total lack of resemblance to film actor Tom Cruise, and some downright silly rag-doll physics made a story with a lot of potential into a game with a lot to be desired. Apparently the precogs weren't on hand to tell anybody ahead of time that this game was going to suck.

8. Die Hard Vendetta Vivendi Universal Games for the GameCube

With guns, close-quarters fighting, massive explosions, copious profanity, and macho bravery, *Die Hard* has the makings of a good video game—and it became a decent one for the PlayStation as Die Hard Trilogy, an ambitious if early attempt at multiple styles of gameplay on one disc. The unrelated Vendetta, however, retreads old first-person-shooter ground without much need for, say, quality control. Weak graphics, a subpar frame rate, ill-fitting stealth segments, lousy voice acting, dim A.I., clunky controls, and—aaaaugh!—jumping puzzles send this one back to the store faster than you can say, "Nakatomi Plaza."

CONTINUED ▶

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7. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon Ubisoft for the PS2 and Xbox

Lyrical. Beautiful. Poetic. Stirring. Ang Lee's martial arts love story is all these things, but the game is none of the above. Players control all four of the movie's main characters but cannot conquer such things as lousy collision detection and utterly apocryphal controls (the game features some of the most illogical button assignments ever). The camera seems to be programmed to seek out obstructions, and instead of balancing what could have been incredible martial arts gameplay, the old limited-continues trick was employed, and the game was kicked out the door. "I didn't feel the bliss of enlightenment," says Li Mu Bai in the film. "Instead...I was surrounded by an endless sorrow." Word.

6. Batman Forever Acclaim for the SNES and Genesis

Lots of companies had taken a swing at the Caped Crusader before Acclaim—Sunsoft, Atari, and Sega among them. But Acclaim's entry wasn't so much a swing as a low blow. Granted, the film it was based upon was a misstep for the franchise, but...it's the Dark Knight, for crying out loud. Nipples or no, he's an icon! He's brooding; he's a badass! What could go wrong? Well, nearly everything explodes (including plants, brick walls, and doors when enemies walk through them), the music is annoying, and the controls are counterintuitive—so much for using all those nifty Bat-gadgets, even if one of them is named "Sticky Goo." Poor use of parallax scrolling makes it impossible to see enemies during a fight, and, oh yeah, the SNES cart had...load times. Load times—on a cartridge?! Between very similar-looking screens, the game would say, "Hang On." Maybe Acclaim was ahead of its time there. In any case, Major Mike summed this one up in two words: "Batman Whatever."

5. Blade and Blade II Activision for the PlayStation, PS2, and Xbox

Why is Blade so cool in the movies? He moves really, really fast and kicks vampire butt with serious style. Check out the films, and you'll see a whirl of black leather and black sunglasses blowing away black-hearted vampires. What you won't see in theaters is Blade getting stuck looking for the red key for the red door or wasting time going in circles while navigating generic, mazelike structures—and you will never, ever see him running like molasses. But Marvel's vampire hunter does just that in both his games, totally wasting (twice!) what could have been a razor-sharp action franchise. Blade? Dull.

4. The Lawnmower Man THQ for the SNES and Genesis

Missed the movie? You didn't miss much. A pre-Bond Pierce Brosnan stars in something like *Flowers For Algernon Online*, where a simple, titular lawnmower man becomes super-smart and all-powerful due to virtual reality experiments. Sounds like a cool game, though, huh? Um, no—Lawnmower Man tries to be everything and winds up as nothing, milking Mode 7 effects for all they're worth and ripping off Gyruss, Spy Hunter, Wolfenstein 3D, Space Harrier, and Contra in one substandard swoop. Instead of the player taking tons of damage and enemies falling with one shot, the formula is reversed—baddies take multiple hits before expiring, but one shot does you in. Needless to say, the movie's fancy (for 1992) computer graphics didn't show up here, and Stephen King sued to have his name removed from the flick. Turns out the movie had little to do with his short story...and the game has little to do with fun.

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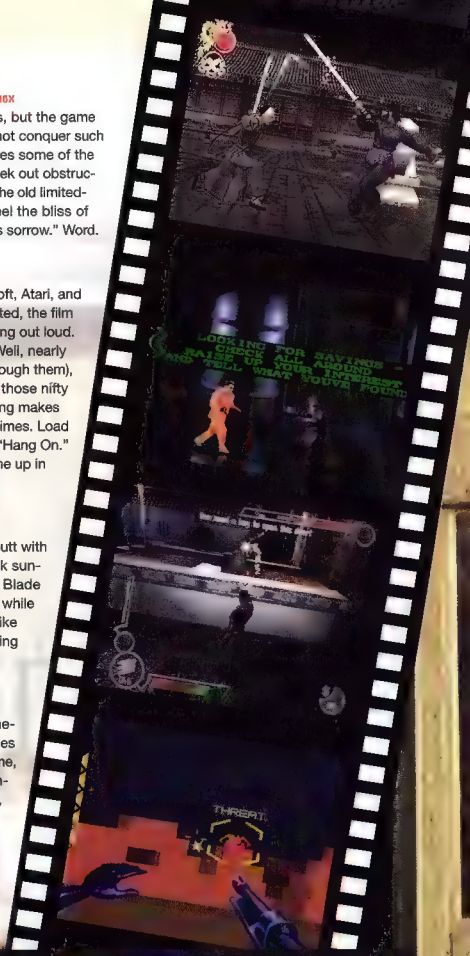


5 to 1: The Best Movie Games Ever

5. The Thing Black Label Games for the PS2 and Xbox

Did you miss this one? If you're a fan of survival/horror games or John Carpenter's classic 1982 monster movie, go to your nearest clearance bin and give this game a home. Scary stuff, well executed, and very much in the spirit of the film.

4. Disney's Aladdin Sega for the Genesis

Enter the Matrix honcho David Perry made his mark with this brilliant 2D side-scroller that features all the animated flair of the Disney film. This game is a 16-bit masterpiece.

3. Star Wars Atari for the arcade

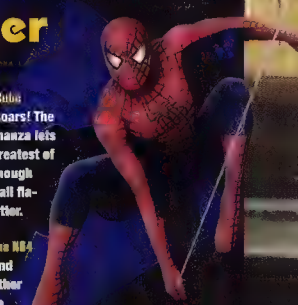
Vector graphics, baby! The minimal visuals and basic synthesized tones of John Williams' score don't diminish the immersive feeling that you are actually in the cockpit of an X-Wing, hurtling down the trench of the Death Star. That custom analog controller makes all the difference—and if you have the chance to play the cockpit version, do so.

2. Spider-Man Activision for the PS2, Xbox, and GameCube

He swings, he shoots (webbing), he soars! The tie-in for Sam Raimi's big-budget bonanza lets gamers fly through the air with the greatest of ease, juggling movie plot lines and enough comic-book zest to make fanboys of all flavors happy. The sequel looks even better.

1. GoldenEye Nintendo for the N64

Four-player, first-person-shooter Bond goodness from the folks at Rare. Whether or not you liked its namesake movie doesn't matter—this is social couch gaming at its finest.



Welcome to
CRAZYWORLD

3. Street Fighter: The Movie

Capcom/Incredible Technologies for the arcade; Acclaim for the PlayStation and Saturn

So they made a game, then they made a movie about the game, and then they made a game about the movie about the game. This was such an obviously poor idea that Capcom didn't even program it; instead, Incredible Technologies (yes, the Golden Tee Golf people—not to mention Time Killers) took the basic fighting mechanics, applied them to digitized versions of 14 of the film's stars (including "The Muscles from Brussels" Jean-Claude Van Damme, *Addams Family* patriarch Raul Julia, and pop star Kylie Minogue) and created a game that accurately represented the film: pure suckage. They're both really hard to accept as being official products; it's more like someone remaking Street Fighter in Mortal Kombat's image. Most purists disavow the existence of this one. One play and you'll know why.

2. E.T. the Extra Terrestrial

Atari for the Atari 2600

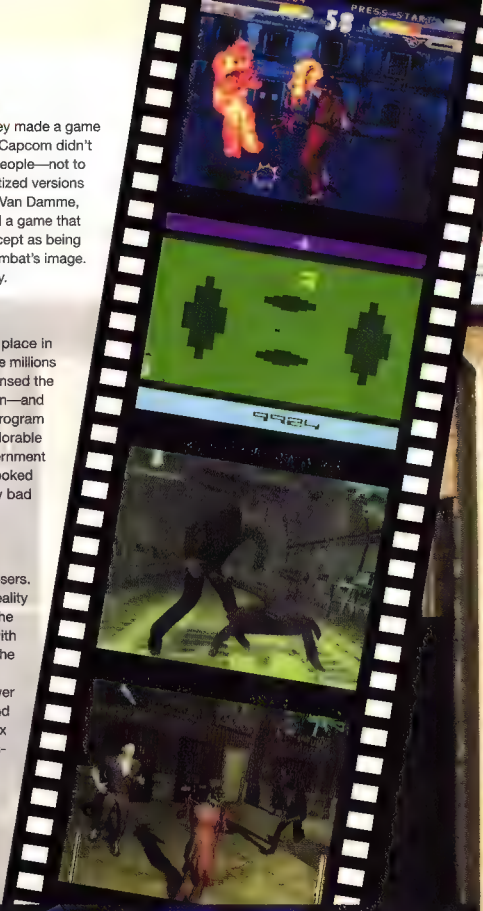
As the first truly abysmal movie tie-in game, E.T. deserves its own special place in history—and that place, of course, is an infamous landfill in New Mexico, where millions of unsold copies of this clunker were buried and left to decompose. Atari licensed the hot property for an exorbitant sum—Steven Spielberg reportedly got $25 million—and gave respected programmer Howard Scott Warshaw a mere six weeks to program it from start to finish. The heroic effort yielded unplayable results—all the adorable little critter did was fall down holes and try to avoid randomly appearing government agents while collecting pieces of the transmitter to phone home. The game looked phone homely and ultimately became a shining, tarnished example of how bad gameplay can sink even the strongest license.

1. Enter the Matrix

Atari for the PS2, Xbox, and GameCube

This could have been The One; instead, it's ranked number-one on the list of losers. *The Matrix* offered a rich sci-fi story about a world run by computers where reality is a mere simulation and power is wielded by anyone brave enough to hack the system. It had the ultimate genre twist at its core: Computers play games with people instead of the other way around. Plus, how many times did you hear the film's kinetic kung-fu action scenes described as "video-game-like"?

How, then, did Enter the Matrix wind up as such a horrible game? The answer is "slowly and at great expense." Despite an hour of exclusive film footage and a script by the Wachowski brothers, the hilariously overhyped Enter the Matrix established itself as a haven for collision problems, control deficiencies, questionable textures, and boring combat with brain-dead A.I. opponents—on all three platforms. Oh, and sometimes the game just freezes your console. Gamers wanted this to kick ass because the first *Matrix* movie kicked ass; opinions are divided in regards to the cinematic sequels, but the game, it has been universally agreed, sucks. Atari was quick to point out how many millions of copies were sold in short order, but Agent Smith can replicate like a virus, too.



5 to 1: Movies That Should Be Games

5. The Seven Samurai

Yeah, yeah, there's that 20XX remix—but forget about that. Go back to what made Kurosawa's original film so beautiful and important, and make *that* into a game. If you want to do *The Magnificent Seven*, that's okay, too—just approach it with the same reverence.

4. Highlander

There can be only one...but that's not true because you meet all kinds of different immortals, even in the first movie. Imagine a weapon-based fighter with Connor MacLeod, Ramirez, the Kurgan, and what the heck, let's throw in Duncan MacLeod for good measure. Round out the remaining roster with the franchise's secondary characters, and you've got all the makings of a cool cult hit.

3. Ghostbusters

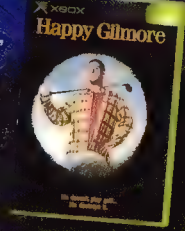
The old Commodore 64 game was pretty cool for its day, but we're long overdue for a decent upgrade. Think third-person action/adventure, sorta like Lara Croft but with particle throwers and the Ectomobile. Other games have borrowed concepts from *Ghostbusters*, so it's time to do the original right.

2. Pulp Fiction

Movies can do action; games can do action. Movies play with time...and games don't. Someone needs to monkey with the linear narrative in the same way, so take an innovative idea about how gameplay unfolds and marry it with a license like *Pulp Fiction*, a movie that tells its tale out of chronological order. And yes, it has all those action elements, too: robberies, hired hits—hell, throw in a dance contest at Jack Rabbit Slim's.

1. Happy Gilmore

The award for the NES game with the world's most misleading title goes to "Lee Trevino's Fighting Golf." Well, here's the chance to make it right! Adam Sandler's comic masterpiece would be the only game to combine golf, fisticuffs, and an ice-hockey mini-game (where you try to stab people with your skates). Sports, action, fighting...quick, get Bob Barker on board before he expires!



Why Do Video-Game Movies Suck?

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If you were to give a gas station attendant a scalpel and say, "Operate on this patient," what would you expect the outcome to be? Unless he was a particularly brilliant gas station attendant who happened to be pumping petrol to finance his med school tuition, you'd get a dead patient and an apology. The poor guy doesn't know anything about medicine; it wouldn't be surprising if he tried to perform surgery with a squeegee and a quart of oil.

Now, if you gave, say, a video game to a filmmaker and said, "This is your new subject matter," would you expect any greater a margin of success? It's the same deal: the right tools in the wrong hands. There are exceptions—most people found the first *Mortal Kombat* film to be mindless fun, and some Final Fantasy fans bought into *Final Fantasy* because it was called Final Fantasy—but by and large, due to a basic lack of comprehension about what makes games tick in the first place, video-game movies suck.

And now, after hours of tireless research and countless trips to Blockbuster, we know why. Behold the dirty secrets of the movie industry, laid bare for your amusement in an easy-to-read chart format. Keep these elements in mind as you follow the zillions of video-game movies in development. For, to steal a line from *TRON*, "On the other side of the screen, it all looks so easy...."

Movie	Plot	Spunky fansite	Buddies travelin'	Hero from troubled home	Government/ evil corp.	Dazzling and/or pointless FX	Respected actor in embarrassing role	Line, please...
Super Mario Bros. 1993, Cinergi/Hollywood *John Leguizamo, Bob Hoskins*	Two plumbers save the world from Dennis Hopper		✓		✓	✓	✓	"The tunnel just sneezed us out, and this giant booger saved us!"
Street Fighter 1994, Universal *Jean-Claude Van Damme, Raul Julia*	Col. Guile saves the world from M. Bison	✓	✓		✓		✓	"You're pretty smart. Let's see how smart you are when you're not breathing!"
Double Dragon 1994, Universal *Scott Wolf, Alyssa Milano*	Three teens save the world from unspeakable evil	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	"Hey broom head—we're gonna sweep the floor with your skull!"
Mortal Kombat 1995, New Line Cinema *Christopher Lambert, Brigette Wilson*	Martial artists save the world from unspeakable evil	✓	✓	✓		✓		"A handful of people on a leaky boat are going to save the world?" "Exactly."
Mortal Kombat Annihilation 1997, New Line Cinema *Robin Shou, Talisa Soto*	Martial artists save the world from unspeakable evil (again)	✓	✓	✓		✓		"I've gotta go to the bathroom, but I have no toilet paper and have two mechanical arms."
Wing Commander 1999, 20th Century Fox *Freddie Prinze Jr., Matthew Lillard*	Hotshot pilots save the galaxy from unspeakable evil	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	"Let's make our miracle."
Tomb Raider 2001, Paramount *Angelina Jolie, Jon Voight*	An archaeologist and her breasts save the world from unspeakable evil	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	"So, time to save the world again, is it?" "Absolutely."
Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within 2001, Columbia *Ming-Na, James Woods*	A scientist saves the world from unspeakable evil	✓	✓			✓		"*Please* tell me we're risking our lives for that little plant."
Resident Evil 2002, Sony *Milla Jovovich, Michelle Rodriguez*	Military chicks save the world from unspeakable and resident evil	✓	✓			✓		"I implore you." "Implore away!"
Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life 2003, Paramount *Angelina Jolie*	An archaeologist and her breasts save the world from unspeakable evil (again)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	"Remember that 'no gun' rule? I reconsidered!"
House of the Dead 2003, Artisan *Clint Howard, if that counts*	Teenagers throw a party on the island of unspeakable evil	✓	✓	✓		✓		"This is a bad island."

Agree? Disagree? What did we miss? Make your opinions known in the Forum at GamePro.com.

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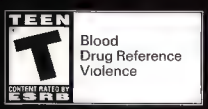

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Need for Speed Underground 2

While exposure to the tuner car culture has certainly subsided in recent times, that doesn't mean it has stopped raging in your town. EA's betting that *The Fast and the Furious* movement, which it outstandingly portrayed in Need for Speed Underground last year, is still revving at high RPMs, and that fans still can't get enough of racing the streets with a totally tricked-out car.

Street Smart

EA took a large risk in turning its Need for Speed series from a high-end country club European class into a street-smart urban attitude Japanese importer. The look, the feel, and even the sounds of the first Underground were distinctly different from those of any other racer. But more importantly, the game reflected the young drivers who use bloated exhaust pipes and pure nitrous gas for one hell of a ride. The sequel to Underground should bring the same unruly fast action with new features that once again play into the street racing culture.

An even more authentic tuner experience is what to expect in Underground 2. This time, the hottest street races take place in a free-roaming city (with real-time weather effects and environmental hazards) that is divided into five unique neighborhoods, which are all connected with intertwining and driveable freeways. Making a name for yourself doesn't happen automatically anymore. Races can happen anywhere and at any time. The only way to find out where to buy the slickest upgrades or compete in the most demanding event is to be clued in as you encounter rivals on the street.

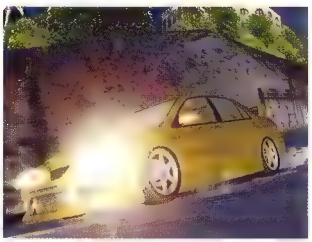
Pimp My Ride

Of course, urban racing isn't the only draw to slamming on the gas. It's about presentation, too. You can apply more than twice as many visual customizations than in the first Underground, plus you'll have a wider selection of auto upgrades that range from improving your audio system and roof scoops to adding wide body kits and glowing neon. More than 30 auto manufacturers are represented in Underground 2, including Toyota, Ford, and Volkswagen.

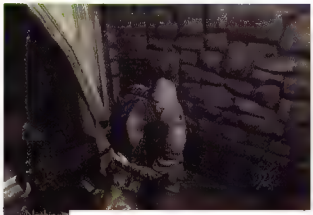
All of the gameplay modes from last year are included as well as three new modes, plus PlayStation 2 racers can jockey for street status online. Need for Speed Underground sizzled last year, and with improvements and additions for the sequel, this tricked-out ride could once again rule the streets.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

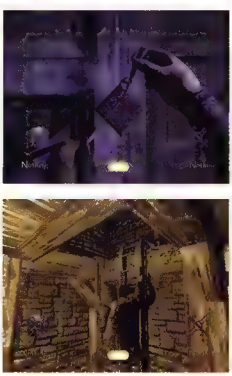
■ First Look ■ Developed by EA Canada ■ Published by EA Games ■ Target release date: Fall 2004

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.



Thief: Deadly Shadows





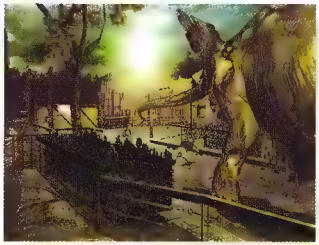
As the third installment in the previously PC-only stealth/action series, Thief: Deadly Shadows makes several notable departures from the series by appearing on a home console and including a new third-person perspective. In Deadly Shadows, you again assume the role of Garret the thief as he sneaks and steals his way out of another complex and dangerous conspiracy. The choice of views will enable gamers to select the view mode that best suits their style of play or the requirements of a particular situation, and both the third- and first-person perspectives played equally well (and were changeable on the fly) in the preview build. Although the early version was plagued with buggy collision detection and a nasty crashing habit, the game still felt rather promising with outstanding lighting and shadow effects, and a natural control scheme that utilized both analog thumbsticks to move your character.—*Bones*

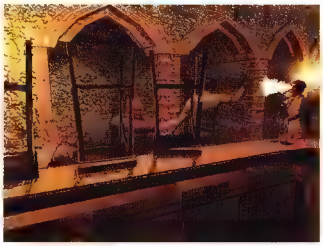
■ **Hands-On** ■ **Developed by Ion Storm**
■ **Published by Eidos** ■ **Target release date: June**

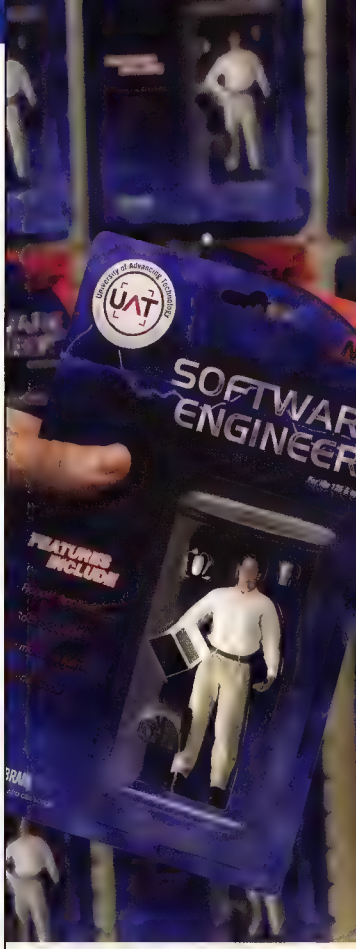
Resident Evil Outbreak File #2

Although Resident Evil Outbreak has been on shelves for only a little over a month, Capcom already has a sequel in the works under the working title of File #2. Not much is known about the game except that it will feature the same eight characters from the first Outbreak and a host of new scenarios. One setting appears to be an abandoned zoo, where you must contend with zombies and even mutated animals (check out the "elephant" in two of these screens). Up to four wannabe survivors can play via online, or you can play solo with three A.I.-controlled NPCs. File #2 will also support the HDD for shorter load times and more seamless gameplay.—*Major Mike*

■ **First Look** ■ **Developed and published by Capcom**
■ **Target release date: Winter 2004**







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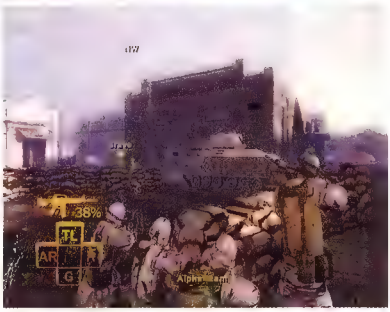
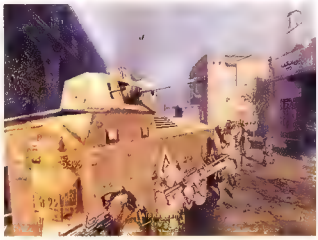
Full Spectrum Warrior

If the Army's troop movement on the ground were to be compared to the fancy choreography of sports entertainment, the soldiers would be the awe-inspiring Laker Girls. Of course, the soldiers wouldn't be judged on beauty—or even brawn—but rather on their complex footwork in a seamless production of cover-and-shoot actions. It's the military's version of the ultimate leg show.

The Absolute Nut Cracker

The delicate ballet of Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT) is already on cue in an early build of Full Spectrum Warrior. With all the hype surrounding the game since it was first introduced at last year's E³, FSW certainly has a lot to prove, and so far, it's living up to expectations. You control a squad of two fire teams (Alpha and Bravo) with just four buttons. You can guide them to anywhere on the battlefield using buildings, cars, benches, just about everything, for cover. Depending on where you duck, however, can be life threatening, too. Wood boards break up fast as do cars under heavy fire, which means you're more likely to get shot up even if you think you've found perfect cover. Smartly applying defensive tactics (using cover at all times) while on the offensive is pretty much the goal to keeping all eight men alive and completing objectives, which range from rescuing injured comrades to eliminating machine-gun nests.





After a quick training session, applying your two teams to fire-and-cover tactics was relatively simple in the preview build. The controls intuitively handled your group's formation automatically whether it was a standard two-by-two rush or forming a line against a building wall. Taking aim at enemies wasn't a problem, either. However, don't expect your troops to be Special Ops–trained marksmen. If a baddie had ample cover, the squad couldn't crush him. But with suppression fire from one team and flanking (which is the core of Army tactics) from the other guys, your leadership skills shined and your team moved on.

Support for Our Troops

This is the bare bone of urban combat tactics that the Army has been using since WWII. And with the recent battles raging on in today's geopolitical climate, Full Spectrum Warrior will be a great way to understand how our troops are trained and what combat incursions they face while they're away from home.

—Four-Eyed Dragon

- **Update**
- **Developed by Pandemic Studios**
- **Published by THQ**
- **Target release date: June**

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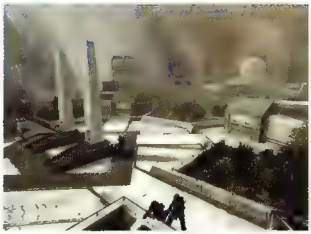
Killzone



PS2 It may come as a surprise that it's taken Sony this long to prepare a PS2 first-person shooter, but Killzone will be its first. Developed by Guerrilla Games (formerly known as Lost Boys Games) in the Netherlands, the game combines elements of FPS combat with squad-based tactics in a gritty, near-future setting that brings to mind Halo and Metal Gear Solid.

Interplanetary Conflict

Killzone takes place in a post-modern era where planetary colonization has brought about the rise of two warring factions of humanity, the ISA and the Helghast. You play the leader of a four-man ISA commando squad suddenly confronting an all-out Helghast blitzkrieg as your planetary defenses mysteriously fail. You lead your team through 11 levels set in jungle, forest, and urban areas to turn back the invasion. The game's environment designs are an intriguing mix of futuristic style with terrain that evokes memories of World War II city combat and Vietnam jungle warfare.

Battlefield Conditions

Killzone is mission-based, and you can choose which member of the squad you want to play prior to the start of each level. The four characters have skills based on the usual criterion: stealth, balanced, and heavy weapons. The game features 26 handheld weapons ranging from knives to rocket launchers, each with a secondary function. You can also find stationary weapons like machine guns or turret cannons to lay down heavy fire.

The character you choose dictates the path you take through each level, but there will also be multiple paths you can choose to complete a level. Moreover, each mission will play to the skill set of a particular squad member. As you encounter 15 varieties of smart and deadly foes both humanoid and mechanical, if that key team member gets taken out, you must start the level all over again.

Avoiding the "H" Word

Teamwork carries over into multiplayer action, too. Offline you can play two-player co-op, and online up to 12 players can engage in team-based combat set in several battlefields. Additionally, Killzone will support the PS2 USB headset for team communication "in the field." Killzone has already sparked comparison with Halo 2 for the Xbox (also due out this fall), but so far it appears to at least give PS2 gamers a fighting chance to enjoy topnotch combat.—*Eye Spy*

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■ First Look ■ Developed by Guerilla Games
■ Published by Sony ■ Target release date: Fall 2004

Shadow Ops: Red Mercury

After two years in production, Atari's big-budgeted, über-hyped military FPS is ramping up for a June release for those who like to play soldier in the safe confines of their home. Inspired by blockbuster war flicks like *Saving Private Ryan* and *Black Hawk Down*, and using a modified Unreal II engine, Shadow Ops: Red Mercury boasts Hollywood-caliber production values with the kind of frenetic intensity only video games can provide. The game's painstakingly rendered environments, based in Chechnya, Syria, Bosnia, and Casablanca, are built around cover objects that players will need to master using in order to progress, and the amount of research that went into re-creating real places, weapons, and even weapon-loading movements is jaw-dropping.

For all of its amazing texturing and full-on orchestral score, the previewable build of Shadow Ops played like a simplistic shooter in the vein of Medal of Honor: Frontline, bent on waging an all-out assault on your immediate senses. The single-player mode featured five campaigns, and although the multiplayer deathmatch and capture-the-flag games were a riot, co-op play will only be available via split-screen, not online. The game could use some more work as the levels were extremely linear and the A.I. scripting was a bit flaccid. In addition, the hit detection and stiff animation could use some tweaking before release.—*Iron Monkey*

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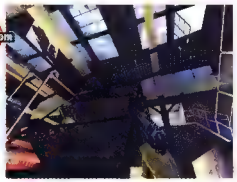
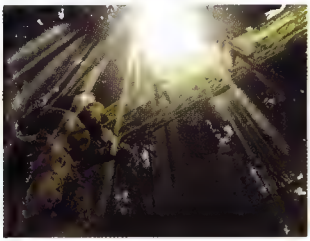
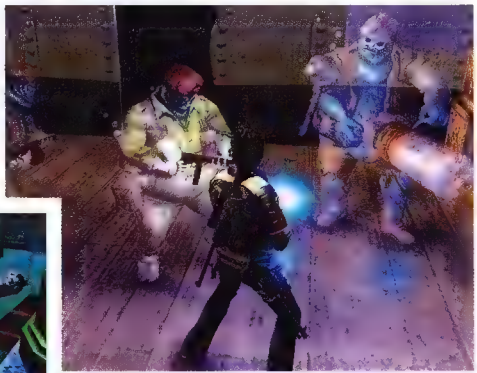




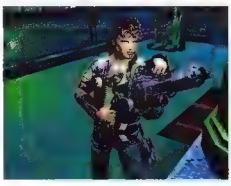
■Hands-On ■Developed by Zombie Studios
■Published by Atari ■Target release date: June

Ghosthunter



When there's something strange in your neighborhood, who you gonna call? Well, apparently, you call up rookie Detroit cop and ghosthunter Lazarus Jones. Developed by SCEE Studio Cambridge, Ghosthunter is a third-person, 3D action/adventure title that blends elements of stealth and strategy with traditional shooting action as you control Lazarus in his life-and-death struggle against, well, the dead.

During a routine investigation at a derelict local high school, Lazarus and his partner, Anna Steele, accidentally uncover the hidden supernatural research facility of Dr. Peter Richmond. While exploring the site, the two novice cops unwittingly free the horde of evil spirits imprisoned in Dr. Richmond's laboratory, and a powerful poltergeist kidnaps Anna while the fleeing phantoms make their escape. One of the liberated ghosts fuses with Lazarus and grants him a special "second sight," thereby allowing him to see into the world of the dead (insert worn-out *Sixth Sense* joke here). With the help of his newly acquired spectral powers and a set of high-tech weapons and gadgets, Lazarus boldly heads out to square off against his ectoplasmic enemies in order to rescue his partner and save the world from certain doom.



If all goes as planned, Ghosthunter should boast a variety of haunted cinematic locations and film-quality graphics that emphasize the spooky ghost effects of the evil phantoms when the title hits store shelves this summer.—*Bones*

■First Look ■Developed by SCEE Studio Cambridge
■Published by Namco ■Target release date: August

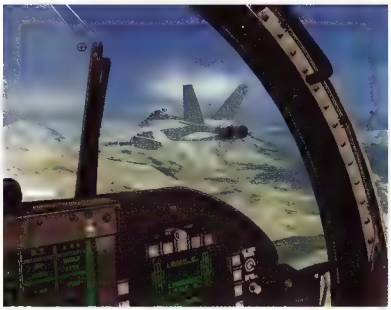
Ace Combat 5

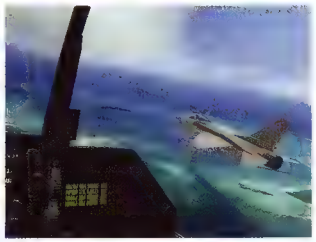
PS2

Hands down, it is *the* series for serious air combat. Ace Combat has continuously proven that arcade aerial shooting using super-realistic airplanes is the best way to have air superiority over everyone else. The fifth installment should be no different.

You're a hotshot fighter pilot assigned to a new squadron whose sole objective is to protect the nation of Osea. Don't worry if you're not familiar with the superpower island of Osea—it's fictional. However, commanding your squad won't be as trivial. New to this series is the ability to direct your wingmen to carry out group attacks while in flight. Radio chatter between teammates will add to the intensity and realism of the battles, too. Your high-flying antics will span over 30 missions that range from thrilling dogfights to dangerous ground attacks, plus you'll have access to a stable of over 50 licensed planes. If these screen shots are any indication, be prepared to go supersonic and happily soar through the unfriendly skies once again this fall.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

- **First Look**
- **Developed and published by Namco**
- **Target release date: Fall 2004**





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Time Crisis: Crisis Zone

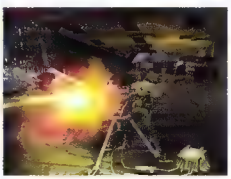
Only the true hardcore shooter fan knows where Crisis Zone fits in the Time Crisis timeline. For the rest of us, it really doesn't matter...or does it? Crisis Zone came out in the arcades after Time Crisis 2 but before Time Crisis 3, which means it's pretty outdated stuff (five years old to be exact). In fact, number three took some mods and refined the gameplay from Crisis Zone, including enemies that need to be shot multiple times to be stopped. So what's the point of going backward if you already own the very solid Time Crisis 3? Simple: It's another good excuse to use your GunCon2 in a frenzied shootout with a bunch of bad guys. And with Namco's excellent track record of unerringly porting its Time Crisis series onto the PlayStation systems, you should also expect plenty of new gameplay modes, bonuses, and hidden stuff in the game.

Like its siblings, Crisis Zone follows the Time Crisis tradition as being a straight arcade light-gun shooter. Unique to the series is the ability to duck-and-cover and reload your weapon by pushing a single button. The rest of your strategy is to pull the trigger as fast as you can before enemies shooting back cover you with lead. If it's as brainlessly fun as the other Time Crisis games, then Crisis Zone can easily be a crisis worth waiting for.

—Four-Eyed Dragon

■ **First Look** ■ **Developed and published by Namco** ■ **Target release date: September**

Terminator 3: The Redemption



Atari's track record with Terminator video games has been less than stellar the past few years. If you had the misfortune of playing either Dawn of Fate or Rise of the Machines, you know what we mean. The third time just might be a charm, though, as the company appears to be taking its time with this one and doing things right.

Originally conceived as a "Terminator racing game," Terminator 3: The Redemption focuses heavily on the chase mechanic that was such a core component of the films. Every level of the game is timed, and there is nearly always an enemy breathing down your neck. The majority of gameplay occurs behind the wheel of a vehicle—though the definition of vehicle can vary wildly. In one level, you might have a pickup truck; later, you might hop on the back of a SkyNet tank and reprogram it to do your bidding.

When on foot, your model T-800 Terminator is put to the test, facing off against wave upon wave of attacking endoskeletons. Paradigm has implemented a fighting mechanic that allows for some nifty combos—one has you ripping a piece of concrete-covered rebar out of the ground, knocking an opposing endo into the air with it, and then impaling it with the exposed end of the bar before it lands—however, the control is very methodical. You don't need to have reflexes of steel to do well.

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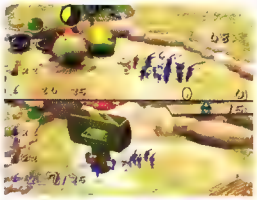
With a story that spans three timelines, solid controls, and a constant sense of urgency, T3: The Redemption may just be the first good Terminator game to hit the consoles in a long time.—*Syriel*

■ **Update** ■ **Developed by Paradigm Entertainment** ■ **Published by Atari** ■ **Target release date: September**

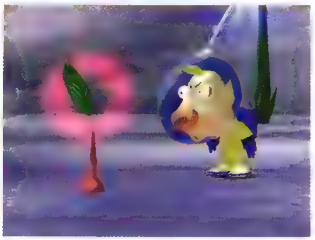
All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.

Pikmin 2



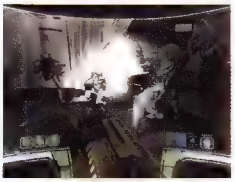
If you didn't play the original Pikmin, you missed out on one of the most creative, clever, charmingly delightful games ever to grace the GameCube, a masterful Miyazaki-meets-Miyamoto brain exercise that mixed pseudo real-time-strategy gameplay with the weird, wondrous world of xenobotany. The only problem was the length—too short—and too easy, too, as you could find the game's 30 ship parts in just about six hours with little incentive to return.

Here comes the sequel to correct those mistakes. The basic gameplay is rightfully the same: As Captain Olimar (and, alternately, his new assistant, Louie), you plant and grow the plant-based Pikmin, then guide them into the wilderness to collect "precious doodads" and bring them back to your ship. To make things a little more interesting and a little less over-frantic, the original game's 15-minute exploration time limit has been lifted, and areas are randomly generated to allow for maximum replayability—you can even play split-screen with a friend. There are also new Pikmin colors (including black and violet) that have their own special powers joining the red, yellow, and blue. The game's been delayed a few times, but it's finally coming out this fall—and there's nothing better than more of a wonderful thing.—*Star Dingo*



■ **Update** ■ **Developed and published by Nintendo**
■ **Target release date: Fall 2004**

Star Wars Republic Commando



Following in the footsteps of the popular Rainbow Six series, LucasArts is taking the Star Wars military into squad-based action with a more accessible bent than Clancy's deadly serious undertaking. Set between *Episodes II* and *III*, Star Wars Republic Commando puts you in command of a four-person unit of clone troopers trained in covert operations. Fighting from a first-person perspective, your adventures will span three large campaigns set on Geonosis, in space, and on the Wookiee homeworld Kashyyyk. On the multiplayer front, you'll find 16-player action on Xbox Live or four-player split-screen matches.

Some basic A.I. controls your squad, driving them to fight or investigate enemies. With orders, you can have them secure a position, search and destroy, hack a computer, breach a door, and decide whether to lead the way or send them out in front of you like a weapon. There's no route planning or waypoints, but you can attach soldiers to markers in the world, such as commanding a sniper to provide cover from a specific post. Along the way, some will die and be replaced, and occasionally you'll operate solo. NPCs will also sometimes join in your side of the fray—on Kashyyyk, massive Wookiee warriors will get your back as you progress through a city in the trees.

The overall style is much darker and grittier than in the movies—droids, for instance, are more relentless and fierce, rather than being mere comic foils. The early preview version packed plenty of potential in its raw form, and it certainly counts as fresh gameplay in the Star Wars universe. With the summer to polish this shooter, LucasArts could have a promising game in the works. —*Air Hendrix*

■ **Update** ■ **Developed and published by LucasArts** ■ **Target release date: Fall 2004**

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow

Online, Team Rainbow certainly outguns any competition. Since its release, Rainbow Six 3 has consistently been one of the most played games on Xbox Live each month. The game magnificently captures hot, close-quarters gunfighting using some of the most realistic looking and sounding weaponry to date—and it offers some seriously addictive gameplay when you're teamed with a buddy or exchanging bullets with someone else. While it might seem like it can't get any better for RS3 fans, it soon will.

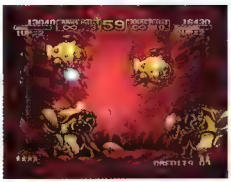
The next mission in the Rainbow Six 3 series will include a brand-new single-player game and a host of multiplayer goodies. Black Arrow will be the first game to take advantage of Xbox Live 3.0 features. You'll be able to create in-game tournaments, send voice and text messages using MSN Messenger while you play, and use the new online storage component to create your own artwork, such as arm patches. You'll also now have access to private team lobbies where you and your squad can use a planning interface to develop strategies before going live against the other group. There will also be two new objective-based multiplayer games: Capture the Point and Capture the Flag. With a slew of improvements and additions to the already strong online gameplay, Black Arrow looks to be right on target.

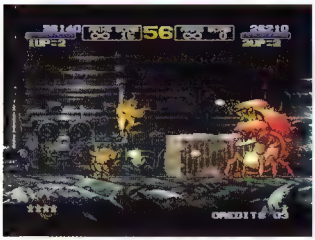
—Four-Eyed Dragon

■ First Look ■ Developed by Ubisoft Montreal
■ Published by Ubisoft ■ Target release date: August

Metal Slug 3

The Metal Slug series has always been renowned for its humorous and intense over-the-top action, and all of those trademark qualities look to remain intact when the series' third offering hits the Xbox. The 2D sprite-graphics series always provides a steady stream of relentless action as enemies swoop in from every conceivable corner of the screen and your only defense consists of various weapons—machine guns, rocket launchers—and a limited stock of grenades. If things get too hectic, you can get a little help from one of the many Slugs—vehicles you can command—that come in many conventional (tanks, planes) and unconventional (camels, elephants, ostriches) forms. You can even free assorted animals that will provide brief assistance. You choose from four mercenaries with few discernible differences other than their sprite schemes, and up to two wannabe commandos can play simultaneously.





In addition to a picture-perfect translation of the arcade game, the Xbox version will have exclusive features in the form of new levels that are unlocked depending on how you perform under fire. The game will also offer Live Leaderboard support to post stats. Looking at these screens, one might wonder why anyone would want to release a 2D-action game like this today. The answer's simple: It's fun. In fact, the only complaint with the preview build is that it had only one playable mission.—*Major Mike*

■ Hands-On ■ Developed and published by SNK ■ Target release date: May

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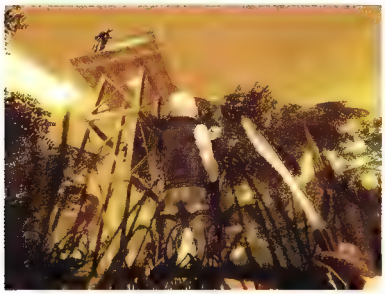
Brothers in Arms

When you think of extraordinary WWII first-person shooting games, you automatically think of Medal of Honor or Call of Duty. Come this holiday season, Brothers in Arms could be added to this elite list. Historical authenticity is what sets Brothers in Arms apart from the other war-torn games—it's based on the true story of Sgt. Matt Baker, who guided his squad of paratroopers through the perils of battle during the invasion of Normandy. You'll lead Baker and his men through accurately detailed areas of the French coast in a combination of arcade and tactical gameplay. Adding to the realism, the game will be gritty and uncensored; plus, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the National World War II Museum have already endorsed it. Brothers in Arms is the first game in developer Gearbox Software's War Story franchise; Ubisoft has signed a 10-year deal to publish the series. *—Four-Eyed Dragon*

■ First Look ■ Developed by Gearbox Software
■ Published by Ubisoft ■ Target release date: Winter 2004

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.

Far Cry Instincts



First-person shooters are a dime a dozen. Every system has its own "killer" shooter, whether it be a Battlefield, Counter-Strike, Halo, or Unreal game—even if it's just brainless shooting with little gameplay innovation. With the introduction of Far Cry on the PC, however, the genre can certainly brag about gameplay diversity. Far Cry was able to find a nonlinear angle on what, at first, seemed to be your typical run-n-gun game, enabling players to actually choose how to combat enemies in many different ways through gung-ho antics, sneaky stealth, tactical assaults, or a combination of any of the three. You could repeat any mission and reach the goal in a totally different way, and in many instances, in more than one way. This fall, console owners will get to try their hand at this PC wonder with Far Cry Instincts, which will also include many more strategies to tackle that pesky enemy. *—Four-Eyed Dragon*

■ First Look ■ Developed by Ubisoft Montreal ■ Published by Ubisoft ■ Target release date: Fall 2004

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.

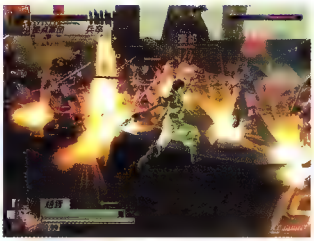
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events

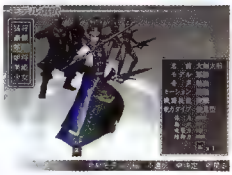
If you are seeking a pleasant romp through a fantasy universe filled with fluffy bunnies and joyous scenes, then you definitely will not enjoy Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events. Based on the morbidly funny and amusingly cruel book series (think Harry Potter minus the magic and any glimmer of hope whatsoever), the tragic tale of the Beaudelaire orphans and their evil guardian, Count Olaf, unfolds on the big screen this fall. Activision's tie-in game will let you control all three kids—intelligent Klaus, inventive Violet, and infantile Sunny—as they attempt to thwart Olaf's plans to steal their family fortune. The books have a subtle and sick sense of humor that has endeared them to readers of all ages; whether the film or the game will be able to capture that vicious Victorian vibe remains very much a mystery. *—Dan Elektro*

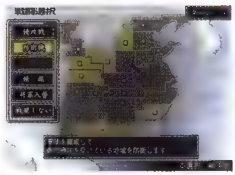
■ First Look ■ Developed by Amaze Entertainment
■ Published by Activision ■ Target release date: Fall 2004

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.

Dynasty Warriors 4 Empires







Following Xtreme Legends comes the next addition to the Dynasty Warriors expansion pack series: Dynasty Warriors 4 Empires. Empires features a single-player Campaign mode in which you can design your own warrior and assign him to a kingdom within one of the 24 distinct map regions. With the help of your powerful army, you must defeat your enemies and take control of the other territories in order to unite China under a single emperor. Enemy generals you face in battle can now be captured and converted to your side, and the morale and strength of your troops can be directly affected by new battlefield strongholds. Also, new officer abilities, an expanded character edit mode, and a revamped tactics system have all been added to the mix, in addition to the new two-player versus challenge mode that lets you go head-to-head with a friend.—*Bones*

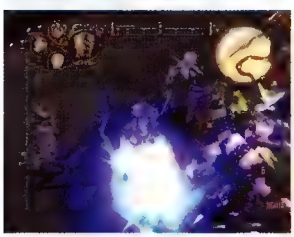
■ First Look ■ Developed by Omega Force
■ Published by Koei ■ Target release date: Summer 2004

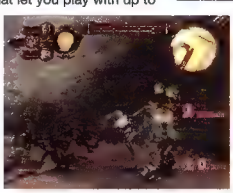
WWE Day of Reckoning

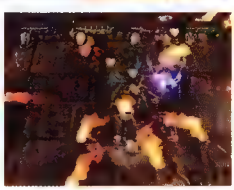
As the newest title in a long line of WWE games, Day of Reckoning promises to distinguish itself from last year's game and the rest of the wrestling pack with a number of new features and some clever technical improvements. In Day of Reckoning, developer Yuke's has placed a heavier emphasis on the single-player experience by including a new story mode in which you create a character and fight your way out of obscurity in the minor leagues against 40 of today's WWE Superstars and WWE Legends in your journey to the pro-wrestling big time. Day of Reckoning will boast improved graphics, an enhanced grappling engine (which includes a new submission system), and the ability to target an opponent's specific body part. And, at long last, GameCube owners can finally experience the sophisticated bliss that is the infamous Bra and Panties match.—*Bones*

■ First Look ■ Developed by Yuke's
■ Published by THQ ■ Target release date: September

McFarlane's Evil Prophecy







Based on the popular line of action figures from McFarlane Toys, McFarlane's Evil Prophecy puts you in control of four magical fighters as they battle against the likes of the Werewolf, Voodoo Queen, Frankenstein's Monster, the Sea Creature, the Mummy, and Dracula to stop the world from entering a time of unending darkness. Evil Prophecy features a single-player story mode (in which you switch control between the four party members) as well as several multiplayer melee modes that let you play with up to three friends. Unfortunately, the preview build we played was unimpressive as the sluggish and clunky control scheme led to random button mashing, while heated battles were marred by slowdown and frozen screens. The imaginative character design, however, did bear the unmistakable McFarlane touch, and with any luck, the nagging flaws can be neatly shored up before the game ships in June.—*Bones*

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by Konami Hawaii
■ Published by Konami ■ Target release date: June

Death by Degrees

Tekken's ultimate assassin, Nina Williams, is back in her very own adventure. Death by Degrees will reveal shocking details about Nina's past and further extend the Tekken universe. When an underground criminal syndicate known only as "Caimetta" secretly develops a high-tech super weapon, Nina is sent in as part of a three-person federal task force to intercept members of the syndicate who will be at a fighting tournament onboard a cruise liner.

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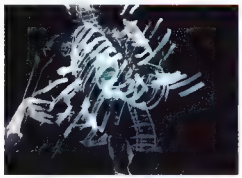

Death by Degrees' gameplay will be a mixed bag of stealth, minor puzzle solving, and a heavy dose of blatant head bashing. The fighting engine will be similar to that of Rise to Honor (both analog sticks are used to control movement, attacking, and defense) and will accurately depict Nina's Tekken moves as well as add a small weapons arsenal to her résumé of chiropractic carnage. The most unique aspect of Death by Degrees will be its onscreen X-ray targeting system that allows players to target specific areas on their enemies and inflict massive internal damage to bones and organs, leading to immediate death or crippling.

It's still early in development, but Death by Degrees should be one to watch this October.
— Rice Burner

■ First Look ■ Developed and published by Namco
■ Target release date: October

Dead to Rights II

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Its showing last year was merely average, but Dead to Rights still made an impact in the mature action genre. This third-person action/shooter heavily borrowed the bullet-time, slow-motion techniques and frenzied firefights from Max Payne, but it also reveled in some very cool disarm moves to thwart the bad guys. Unfortunately, Dead to Rights' gameplay also had a sizeable amount of repetitious and unneeded button-mashing mini-games that ruined the flow.

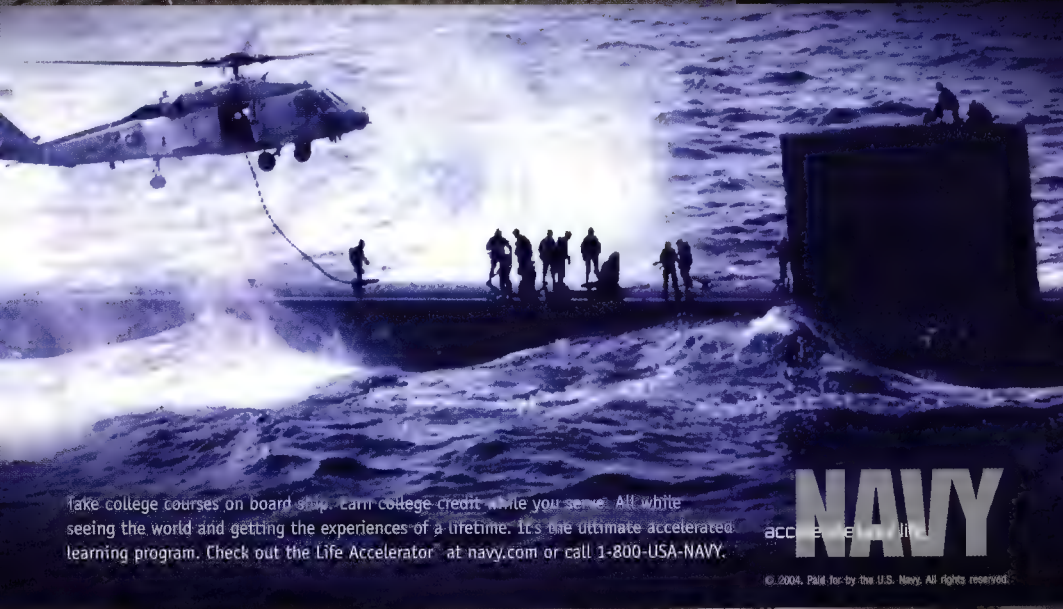
This time around, the sequel hopes to right the past wrongs. You once again play as K-9 officer Jack Slate, who returns to Grant City to protect an innocent girl from the dark secrets of the town. The gameplay will have familiar techniques of attacking multiple assailants at a time, but this time, you'll use a refined melee system where swinging objects like bats, pipes, and machetes are all fair game. Jack's repertoire now includes 25 disarm moves, 13 of which are new to the game. Jack's canine companion, Shadow, has learned more tricks and will assist his master in subduing enemies and retrieving items during a conflict. Besides the usual sidearms, rifles, and semiautomatic weaponry, Jack can now wield mini-guns, shoulder-mounted RPGs, mines, and shotguns that fire off flesh-burning rounds. Yup, Dead to Rights is another mature game—but will it have matured into something better?
—Four-Eyed Dragon

■ First Look ■ Developed and published by Namco
■ Target release date: Fall 2004

All screens shown here are from the PlayStation 2 version.

THE BEST PART OF EARNING A DEGREE IN THE NAVY?

GETTING TO CLASS.



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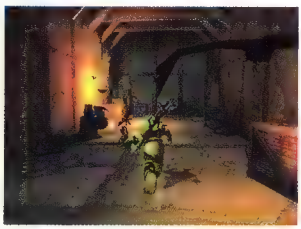
The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay

I know, I know—anything with Vin "XXX" Diesel in it must suck, right? Well, after playing a preview build of Escape from Butcher Bay, the sucking streak looks like it may be coming to an abrupt halt very soon. As a quasi-prequel to the 2000 movie *Pitch Black* and this summer's upcoming *Chronicles of Riddick*, Escape from Butcher Bay is a first-person action title that skillfully blends elements of the stealth, shooting, and adventure genres to create a rather surprising and successful mixture of gameplay styles. You play as Richard B. Riddick, the toughest outlaw in the universe (played by Diesel both in the game and the films) as he attempts a suicidal jailbreak from the "triple maximum security" Butcher Bay facility. Prison is a nasty place, and whether it's spewing from the mouths of the guards and inmates or being scribbled on the prison walls, profanity abounds in Butcher Bay, and so does mercilessly realistic violence—complete with real-time facial deformations and lots and lots of blood. Riddick can fight with all sorts of prison weapons, from shivs and screwdrivers to cutting-edge anti-riot gear like heavy assault rifles and shotguns, or simply beat his enemies senseless with his fists (which works remarkably well in a first-person view). Though still unpolished, the graphics are already stunningly beautiful, thanks to some clever lighting and shadow techniques, and outstanding facial animation.—*Bones*

■ **Hands-On** ■ **Developed by Starbreeze Studios**
■ **Published by Vivendi Universal Games** ■ **Target release date: June**

Rise of the Kasai

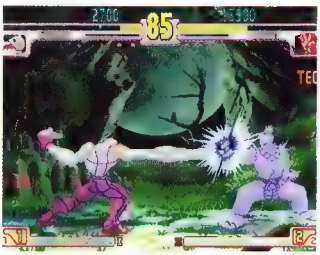


Dare we forget the Mark of Kri? Some gamers disregarded it as yet another wholesome title only mothers could approve of based on its Disney-esque qualities—completely missing the big M-rated label on the box in the process. Well, Sony has plans to unleash a sequel with more punch than the first so nobody makes the same mistake twice. Rise of the Kasai is scripted to tell the history as well as the future of those surrounding our hero, Rau. Among them is a younger sister and second playable character named Tati, who relies on the eyes of the walking dead to see the dangers that lie ahead. The sequel will also add new deadly moves and weapons while reusing the previous, yet still innovative, combat system. There's even multiplayerability so friends can join in co-op missions online.
—*Test Monkey*

■ **First Look**
■ **Developed by Bottlerocket Entertainment**
■ **Published by Sony**
■ **Target release date: First Quarter 2005**

Street Fighter Anniversary Collection

Believe it or not, Street Fighter turned 15 this year, and to celebrate, Capcom is giving franchise fans two games: Hyper Street Fighter II and Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike. Hyper is actually five games in one package. You can choose from 17 fighters and then select their fighting style as it pertains to one of—potentially—five games. (For instance, you could choose Ken and then play with his specific abilities from Super Street Fighter II Turbo.) Street Fighter III makes up the other half of the Collection, appearing in the 3rd Strike incarnation. Nineteen fighters grace that lineup, and the game (which was one of the most anticipated video games in history) features a fighting engine that was distinctive from those found in the "II" titles. For fans of the SF series, this should be an awesome Collection.—*Major Mike*



■ **First Look** ■ **Developed and published by Capcom** ■ **Target release date: July**

Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee

With an exclusive license from Warner Bros., Ubisoft and Ratbag are bringing the daring Duke brothers back for their third video-game appearance in Return of the General Lee. Players will assume the roles of Bo and Luke Duke as they hop into the driver's seat of the General Lee to race for cash in the Hazzard County Derby in order to save an orphanage from Boss Hogg's sneaky plans. Return will feature a full single-player adventure mode with over 18 missions; an unlockable multiplayer mode with cooperative and competitive race modes; and a destruction derby. Fans of the TV series can look forward to appearances by the full cast of the show with voice-overs and likenesses being provided by all the original living actors. Gamers will also get the chance to play as Cooter, Uncle Jesse, and—yes—even Daisy Duke, and race in each character's signature vehicle.—*Bones*

■ **First Look** ■ **Developed by Ratbag**
■ **Published by Ubisoft** ■ **Target release date: October**

All screens shown here are from the PlayStation 2 version.

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude

Fathers, lock up your teenaged daughters—Larry is back! The latest installment of the Leisure Suit Larry series, Magna Cum Laude, will chronicle Larry Laffer's nephew Larry Lovage as he sets out on his journey to woo girls and gain notoriety on his college campus. Players will follow Larry through all the typical college functions, from keg parties to a reality dating game, in his search for campus love. Magna Cum Laude will feature 15 sexy possible girlfriends, 12 mini-games, and 25 locations for Larry to stalk his potential sweethearts. The coolest aspect of Magna Cum Laude is the ability to customize the game's real-time dialogue with an enormous 90,000-word vocabulary. Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude looks like it will be the wildest Leisure Suit Larry title yet.—*Rice Burner*

■ **First Look** ■ **Developed by High Voltage Software**
■ **Published by Vivendi Universal Games**
■ **Target release date: Fourth Quarter 2004**

Iron Phoenix

The highly ambitious Iron Phoenix is Sammy Studios' first effort for the Xbox and will combine the strategic team play elements of an online first-person shooting game with the aggressive combat of a 3D fighter. In addition to a complete standalone single-player mission mode, you can also use Xbox Live to simultaneously battle it out with up to 15 other fighters in any battle arena or outdoor environment. Iron Phoenix will take 3D fighting games into the realm of online team-based combat traditionally reserved for FPS by offering players a number of exciting play modes for both cooperative and competitive play. Set in a world based on mythical legends of Chinese martial arts, the game promises a variety of weapons with more than 10 playable characters and a story worthy of a classic kung-fu flick.—*Bones*

■ **First Look** ■ **Developed by InterServ International**
■ **Published by Sammy Studios**
■ **Target release date: Fourth Quarter 2004**

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The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures

A creative, fun use of connectivity but not part of the essential Link

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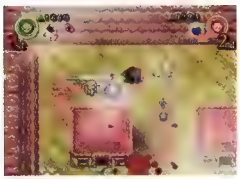
Looking for a reason to drag out all those link cables you bought for Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles? You should check out The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures, a weird, cool party/puzzle/adventure game that's much more entertaining and creative than a GameCube update of a Game Boy Advance mini-game has any right to be.

You can still play solo without any GBAs—a GBA "window" appears on the screen. A nice feature: Once you start a game, you can save, quit, and continue later with a different number of players.

Link's Link

Before you get any wrong ideas, Four Swords Adventures is *not* a Zelda game in the traditional sense. There's no vast world to explore, no giant inventory of tools and talismans to collect and manage, no epic adventure to be had—in other words, it's not Wind Waker 2. It's also not a remake of the SNES game A Link to the Past; it simply borrows graphics, sounds, and control mechanics from that classic (and now obviously dated) game. Nintendo built all these areas and levels entirely from scratch.

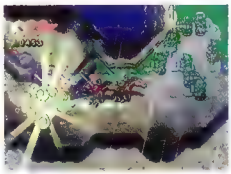


PROTIP: To defeat Shadow Link, attack him until one of his copies turns from black into a color. Then have the "matching" player attack.

Instead, Four Swords Adventures is a sort of series of "miniature" Zelda games: self-contained, dungeon-sized puzzles of varying degrees of brain-bustery. The game's first hook is that there are four Links on screen at once, and all four must actively participate in the solution to each level dungeon by stomping on blocks in tandem, being in the right cave at the right time, working together to pick up gigantic boulders, that sort of thing. The second hook is that whenever Link enters a building, cave, or hole, he goes into the Game Boy Advance, where he finds tools and treasure, and brings them back into the GameCube world. While either idea would be merely gimmicky on its own, the two concepts together make for some really imaginative, inspired, and brain-melting puzzles—and not just your typical dungeon stuff either. More than once, the game has you solving convoluted mysteries that involve almost no combat and lots of thinking in ways you've never really had to think before.

PROTIP: If you leave one Link in the GBA world, then switch to another Link and go to the GameCube world, you won't be able to switch between them with the Select button.

PROTIP: The Great Fairy upgrades the tool you're carrying. The upgraded shovel "dings" and vibrates your GameCube controller (in one-player mode) when you're near buried treasure.



Four Swords Adventures pays homage to Nintendo's past. Listen carefully, and you'll even hear music from the Super Mario Bros. series from time to time.

The Conspicuous Lack of Tetra

While you can control all four Links with one player (the left shoulder button puts them in four different formations) and beat the game that way, Four Swords Adventures is definitely best enjoyed with at least one other person—the more the merrier. There's a lot to be said for sitting on a couch coordinating your plan (all right, who's carrying the hammer?) while secretly trying to figure out ways to get more Force Gems than your friends in the process. In addition to the main quest, there are also a good number of wacky Link party games: some dumb (Epona racing), some uproariously magical (Cucco collecting), some lying somewhere in between (variations of tag that are good with four players but bad with two). Be warned, though: While the one-player game can be played without a Game Boy Advance, you'll need a Game Boy Advance and a link cable for each person involved if you want to play multiplayer.

PROTIP: It's easiest to defeat the World 3 bird boss with at least two people: One player outside tosses bombs at the bird when it swoops low, and the other player waits in a cave with a hammer to hit the bird's head when it crashes through the cave wall.

Zelda Gaiden

While it's a stretch to count Four Swords Adventures as a full part of the Zelda canon, it's still a unique, fun, and well-conceived game. It's not necessarily a reason to go out and buy a bunch of Game Boy Advances and link cables, but it's definitely a reason to get them out of the closet again.—*Star Dingo*

E ■ Developed and published by Nintendo ■ $49.99
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GRAPHICS	3.0	FUN FACTOR
SOUND	4.0	4.0
CONTROL	4.5	

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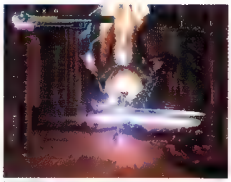
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege

The past is the present is the future.

Onimusha is extremely comfortable in its demonic little groove—an action/samurai sort of Resident Evil with half the scares but twice the playability. This third installment is a great extension with basically the same mechanics as the other games in the series (i.e., elegant, fun, and engrossing). Hallowed ground is held, but none is broken.

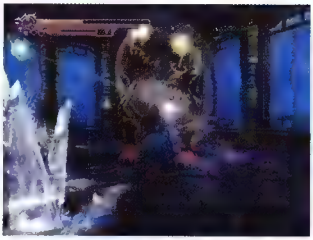


PROTIP: To be a real badass, you must master the timing of the instant-kill Issen counters—tap L1 just as an enemy's blow is about to connect, then immediately hit □.

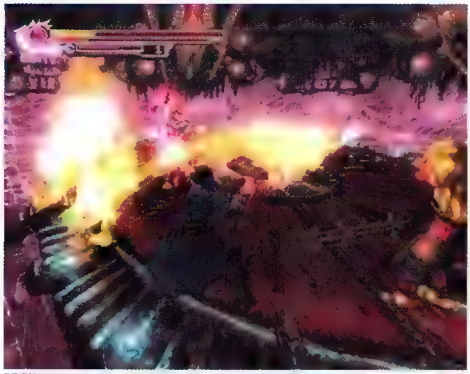
PROTIP: If you die in the same area enough times in a row, "easy mode" will appear in the reload game screen.

Le Professionnel

The big new thing in Onimusha 3 is the addition of Jean Reno (sort of) as a playable character, a whip-slinging Frenchman named Jacques who gets his own soul-sucking Ogre Gauntlet grafted onto his arm. The game divides its time squarely between Samanosuke and Jacques, each of whom have swapped places in time (Jacques is in feudal Japan; Samanosuke is in modern-day France). The gimmick makes for some interesting, clever time-related puzzles (a small, annoying Navi-like fairy can carry key items back and forth through the time stream), but other than that, the settings don't feel all that different—be it the 16th Century or the 21st, both characters are basically fighting the same demons in the same gothic-looking cathedrals and bone-lined caverns.

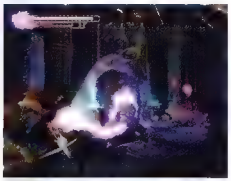


Even a Belmont would be impressed at how Jacques handles his whiplike Ogre Lasso.



PROTIP: Make sure you have Ako's White Vest equipped when you enter the Dark Realm to get the elemental Seals. Use the Vest to heal yourself in between floors.

As these are post–Ninja Gaiden times we live in, the game is bound to feel a bit slow for the first level (get used to not being able to jump or run on walls), but once you adjust, the controls for both characters feel organic and right. Despite the amount of crazy combos and flashy moves on the screen, it always feels like you're in complete control. Simple nudges on the left thumbstick link Samanosuke's sword attacks from enemy to enemy with grace; counterattacks (tap block just as you're hit, then hit □) are a blast to nail; and Jacques' Ogre Lasso with its nifty (but underexploited) ability to bind enemies feels more elegant than Mr. Belmont's whip did in the latest Castlevania game. A couple nit-picks: Holding down R1 to charge your weapon can be a little annoying (you have to hold it down *hard*), and hitting smaller ground creatures (like slugs) is nearly impossible without arrows.



PROTIP: Don't turn into Onimusha form manually—it's much better if you save it as "insurance" in case you die.

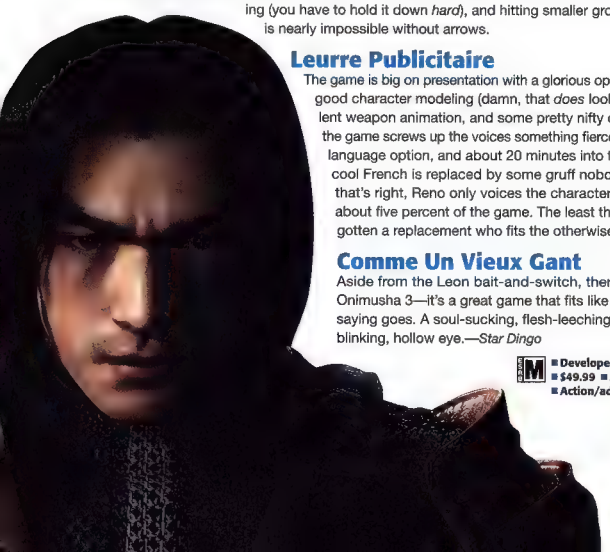
Jacques and Samanosuke aren't the only playable characters—but they're the only *fun* ones.

Leurre Publicitaire

The game is big on presentation with a glorious opening cinema sequence, good character modeling (damn, that *does* look like Jean Reno!), excellent weapon animation, and some pretty nifty demons. Unfortunately, the game screws up the voices something fierce: There's no Japanese-language option, and about 20 minutes into the game, Jean Reno's cool French is replaced by some gruff nobody's cloying English—that's right, Reno only voices the character that looks like him for about five percent of the game. The least they could have done is gotten a replacement who fits the otherwise very cool character.

Comme Un Vieux Gant

Aside from the Leon bait-and-switch, there are few surprises in Onimusha 3—it's a great game that fits like an old glove, so the old saying goes. A soul-sucking, flesh-leeching glove with one creepy, blinking, hollow eye.—*Star Dingo*



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- Developed and published by Capcom
- $49.99 ■ Available now
- Action/adventure ■ 1 player

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GamePro Editors' Choice

GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR	4.5
SOUND	4.0		
CONTROL	4.5		

Red Dead Revolver

Red Dead Revolver escapes the hangman and lives on as a topnotch action/adventure set against the Old West.

Once in development by Capcom and then put on death row, Red Dead Revolver has been saved from the hangman by Rockstar Games. Not only has Red escaped the rope, but it has also evolved into a brilliant third-person action game loaded with style, technique, and clever homages to the Wild West.

"It's a hell of a thing to kill a man. You take away all he's got. And all he was ever gonna have."—Clint Eastwood, *Unforgiven*

Dances with Lead

The plot is as simplistic as any Western film, of which the game emulates many: Red seeks vengeance on varmints who killed his family and wounded him in the process. Playing into the stereotype of Red's part–Native American heritage is an inherent expertise with knives and a Spaghetti western's self-taught gun-fighting skills. But the road to revenge is littered with plot twists and cleverly placed secondary characters (you even play as a boss in a flashback) to spice up the story. Varied stages reflect their objectives: destroy a bridge, thwart corrupt politicians, defend besieged homesteaders, board a racing locomotive from horseback, and resort to bottles as weapons in a saloon fight—just to name a few.

PROTIP: After a duel, remember to immediately reload your pistol; chances are there may be an ensuing gunfight.

PROTIP: In the town of Brimstone, be sure to talk to all the townsfolk because some of them can sell items and rare journal entries.

PROTIP: When playing as Annie, be careful when shooting the locks off the doors in the barn—bulls could rush out and cause you harm.

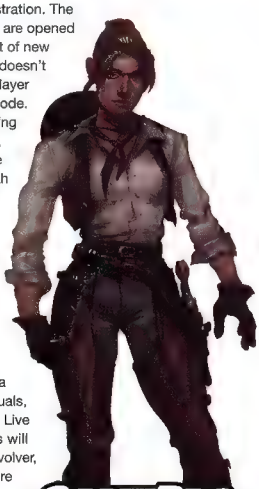
PROTIP: Draw enemies into each other's lines of fire so they kill each other, not you.

PROTIP: For a nasty two-hit "combo," get in close to an enemy, punch them, and then deliver a shot at point-blank range to the head.

Better Red Than Dead

Red excels in technique and presentation. As daunting as the skills are to learn, they're a true force to be reckoned with once mastered: The slow-motion bullet-time-esque Dead Eye is supplanted with a host of melee and gun-fighting moves—including duels that are half-skill, half-luck, and pure frustration. The game also serves up decent replays with several unlockable features that are opened depending on your performance, and once the game is completed, a host of new objectives are also available. Red's other key aspect, multiplayer battles, doesn't fare well due to a confining split-screen view that renders three or more player matches almost unplayable. Red's real strength is the one-player Story mode.

Red looks, sounds, and feels just right. Blowing dust, blazing red skies, and flying lead all create an immersive atmosphere, and frequent visual dust and scratches give the game a filmlike quality without being overly distracting, as does the Peckinpah level of slow-motion bloodletting. Gunfire, explosions, ricochets, and other audio are all excellently conveyed, but the wannabe Ennio Morricone guitar riff/whistle/chorus music strikes sour notes too often. Using dual analog sticks to move and aim, and shoulder buttons to fire work perfectly, and various advanced techniques gradually become instinctive. The only real failing for the controls is lack of a custom configuration.



Open Range

Of the two Red offerings, the Xbox version has a clear edge over its PS2 brother with cleaner visuals, tighter controls, an added multiplayer level, and Live Aware compatibility. But wannabe gunslingers will be well served by either version of Red Dead Revolver, a game that finally does the Western action genre some tough justice.—*Major Mike*

M

■ Developed by Rockstar San Diego
■ Published by Rockstar Games ■ $49.99
■ Available now ■ Action/adventure ■ 4 players

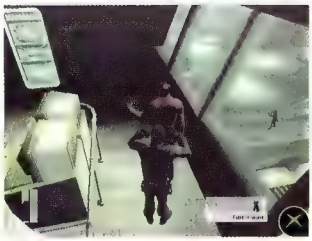
All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 4.5
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	4.0	
XBOX	GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR 4.5
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	4.5	

Hitman: Contracts

In this captivating outing, 47 revisits the past while modernizing the nagging flaws of his previous games, making for his best trail of assassinations yet.



PROTIP: In Deadly Cargo, take out Boris by sneaking into the back of the bridge. It's a good idea to defuse the bomb first, though, just in case.

PROTIP: In Hunter & Hunted, take cover in the bathroom and dispose of the incoming SWAT until the map shows enough of a break in the action for you to creep out of the building in disguise.

Bald & Beautiful

It helps to know the setup of Hitman: Contracts before you sit down to play because the game doesn't make it as ringingly clear as it should. After returning to the assassin's life at the conclusion of Hitman 2, 47 was injured on his latest hit in Paris. Now he deliriously recovers in a hotel room, and he flashes back to some of his past jobs, which take on a mildly nightmarish hue. While that kind of slant could have easily been overdone, developer Io Interactive nails the high-wire balancing act of the whole nightmare angle. The first two missions are downright unnerving, and after that, only the hazy, dreamy lighting and a few subtle touches remind you of the nightmare thing.

From a gameplay perspective, Hitman: Contracts adds up to 12 long missions, only four of which are brand new—the others are retreads from the first PC-only Hitman game that virtually no one played. The first few hits are linear and straightforward, kind of a warm-up. After that, Contracts returns to what earned this series its reputation: wide-open levels with a vast number of solutions but little handholding along the way. The joy comes from uncovering your own path to the target—you can mow down anything that moves, sure, but Contracts will be most fulfilling for those who play within the spirit of the law.

As always, disguises play a huge role in the infiltrations—almost too huge. A quick change of clothes can get you through almost any scrap, but at least Contracts' disguises actually make more sense than they did in Silent Assassin, covering 47's shiny dome with a hat or hood. The A.I. is wiser than it was in the previous game, too, but not so much so that the game becomes too realistic and too hard.

PROTIP: In Bjarkhov Bomb, put the laxative (found in the kitchen) in the soup to send Fuchs to the bathroom. Once he's there, kill him and take his outfit, which makes the rest of the mission much easier.

Mmm...Fibre Wire...

Probably the biggest complaint about Hitman has been the wonky controls, and Contracts should finally put that muttering to rest. 47 is now far easier to maneuver through the levels, and new buttons for instant access to the map and inventory are hugely helpful. But 47 does move with a skating, gliding sort of walk that never manages to look right.

The PS2 and Xbox versions are identical, which is a compliment to the high quality of the PS2 graphics. With Hitman 4 already in the works for 2005, it's great to see this series establish the kind of benchmark of excellence that Contracts represents.—*Air Hendrix*

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

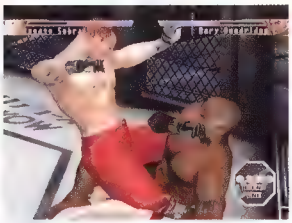
PS2	GRAPHICS 4.5	SOUND 4.5	CONTROL 4.5	FUN FACTOR 5.0
XBOX	GRAPHICS 4.5	SOUND 4.5	CONTROL 4.5	FUN FACTOR 5.0

M ■ Developed by Io Interactive ■ Published by Eidos ■ $49.99 ■ Available now ■ Action ■ 1 player

UFC: Sudden Impact

If you've ever seen an Ultimate Fighting Championship match, then you'd know how exhilarating it is to watch a very big guy skillfully put the beat down on another very big guy using full contact, and often times, brutal fighting techniques. Past UFC games have, for the most part, succeeded in replicating that excitement, but in Sudden Impact, the gameplay doesn't quite have that same intense...er, punch.

PROTIP: Create your custom fighter into an all-around pugilist. Have him focus his training on standing attacks with kickboxing and learn new grappling moves with wrestling.



PROTIP: Bring down an opponent against the cage, and he'll have a hard time countering your attacks from the bottom.

The largest fault in Sudden Impact is shoddy controls. The basic setup remains the same as in other UFC games—you can perform a variety of punches, kicks, counters, and grapples using just four buttons. The drawback in executing these moves comes in the form of slow button response. It's tough to pull off a counter if the buttons don't register at the exact moment, and it's hard to attack with a flurry of side-step combos when, in combination with a button press, the directional pad and analog stick just don't react efficiently. Another big downfall is the game's substandard visual presentation. The PS2 is certainly capable of producing sharper graphics than what the game contains. Even the sound effects are disappointingly off sync. To its credit, Sudden Impact has some cool additions, such as new moves and a solid career mode, but with better fighters already available, including older UFC games, it doesn't quite make the impact that previous UFC games used to.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

PS2	GRAPHICS 2.5	SOUND 2.5	CONTROL 3.0	FUN FACTOR 3.0

T ■ Developed by Opus ■ Published by Global Star ■ $19.99 ■ Available now ■ Fighting ■ 2 players

RalliSport Challenge 2

Most U.S. gamers aren't burning for a realistic, detailed rally-racing sim. Instead, they prefer the arcade-tinged vibe that Sega Rally established—a legacy that RalliSport Challenge 2 taps into perfectly. While the sublime handling and authentic detail of the Colin McRae series maintain its top-dog spot in rally racing, RalliSport 2 is a far more accessible game that will appeal to a wider audience.

PROTIP: In rallycross races, use opposing cars as braking cushions by taking the inside line and sliding into them.

Tires Spinning

The highlights of this more-of-a-good-thing sequel are the new Career mode and online support, which includes online racing and custom leagues via XSNSports.com. You'll spend most of your time there and in the Career mode, which bends the popular Gran Turismo approach into branching trees of events that enable you to select your own path through the competition. Success is rewarded with unlocked cars (40 total) and tracks (90 total in five countries). RalliSport retains its diverse selection of events—there's a lot more here than just soloing in a rally event. You'll also tackle hill climbs, rallycross (the NASCAR-esque version of rally, which is tons of fun), and ice races, which involve more spinning than a Kristi Yamaguchi performance.

PROTIP: Your co-driver's advice is most useful on sharp turns—the difference between "cut" and "don't cut" can give you the winning edge.

The difficulty of the events ramps up smoothly, and the cars handle crisply in a way that's much snappier but less realistic than the Colin McRae series. Most players will find that to be a fine thing—you'll get the experience of ripping through a powerslide or battling through a fishtail without a whole lot of finesse getting in the way. The cars take damage without consequences, so there's no barrier to unleashing your inner speed demon and hurtling down the track on the bleeding edge of control—RalliSport is much more about these moments than the more subtle thrills of Colin's finesse driving.

PROTIP: In Sweden, it's better to brake hard than to drag a wheel through the snow piled along the roadside and lose control.

Mud Flying

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Visually, the game sports fantastic environments with rich lighting and cool details like mud spraying from tires. The cars are more ho-hum in their appearance, though—there's nothing in particular that's wrong about them, but they could use more sex appeal. The audio hits the same quality mark—it's good enough that you don't notice it much, but it's also not good enough to make you appreciate it. The co-driver in particular sounds like a voice actor plodding through his lines in a sound booth—too much realism there, perhaps.

RalliSport represents another fine racing game from Microsoft, and the online support in general should make it worth driving for quite some time. It's not a jaw-dropper in any way, but it is just lots of fun to drive.—*Air Hendrix*

E | ■Developed and published by Microsoft ■$49.99 ■Available now ■Racing ■4 players

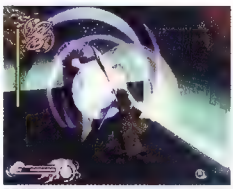
GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR	4.5
SOUND	4.0		
CONTROL	4.5		

Bujingai: The Forsaken City

As a 3D martial arts platformer, Bujingai will undoubtedly be compared to the very similar, Xbox-exclusive Ninja Gaiden. But although both titles are rich with demon fighting and acrobatics, Bujingai ultimately falls short of the mark with a barely there story, doggy camerawork, and a surprisingly short completion time.

Bujingai is set in a futuristic, post-apocalyptic Asia, and you play as the super-femme, dual sword–wielding Lau King Feather (voiced by Japanese rock star Gackt), who must fight his way through eight stages of uninspired enemies to save his long-time pal turned bad guy. The plot (a haphazard jumble of Chinese fantasy nonsense) is unfortunately intelligible and incoherent, making your quest seem like a meaningless and repetitive exercise in button pressing (which it is for the most part).



PROTIP: Blocking enemy magic is a fast way to replenish your own supply and launch a devastating return fire.

Lau is capable of some truly amazing aerial stunts, such as wall running and gliding, though the inconsistent camerawork tends to leave you with awkward angles that can cause a fair amount of accidental (but thankfully nonlethal) falls. The combat system is both surprisingly deep and unfortunately simple: deep because you can block, parry, and counterattack enemies with relative ease, and simple because almost all of these special moves are executed with a single, overworked × button, and most opponents (including most bosses) are total pushovers.

PROTIP: When attacked from the front, release the left analog stick and Lau will automatically block, then press □ repeatedly to perform deadly counterattacks.

Despite the four difficulty settings and the host of unlockable extras and secrets, Bujingai: The Forsaken City just feels too easy as experienced gamers will breeze through it in roughly 10 hours or less. Rent if you wish—buy if you must.—*Bones*

T | ■Developed by Taito ■Published by BAM! Entertainment ■$49.99 ■Available now ■Action/adventure ■1 player

GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR	3.5
SOUND	4.0		
CONTROL	3.5		

What Is It Good For?

Take a few steps back, away from the keyboard and mouse, and look at pretty much every game you've played lately. What's the common thread?

Killing.

From EverQuest to Painkiller, from Warcraft III to Battlefield Vietnam, the vast majority of games involve players in quests to kill something or someone. With magic or mini-guns, violence is violence, and despite how you feel about congressional pushes to censor the industry, you have to admit that our hobby encompasses violence.

But why? Any 11th-grade English teacher will tell you that drama comes from conflict. Without conflict, you just have a few people hanging out, possibly telling stories. There's no drama there. The instant one of those guys says something the others don't like, however, *boom*! Drama erupts. The guys get into a fight, or at the very least a civil argument, and the whole situation is suddenly more interesting.

People ask if games make people violent, and it's hard to say. Maybe games can introduce someone to violence, and maybe they desensitize people to violent imagery, but it's probably more likely that human nature makes games violent than it is the other way around. If violence and conflict weren't engaging, then games as far back as Space Invaders and Pac-Man wouldn't have featured them as central themes, gamers wouldn't have supported this new medium, and the games we play now would be quite different. Instead, we're looking at a new Doom game this year, along with other titles that share the common ground of killing.

"Might I interest you in a nice set of AAAAAAARRRRGH!!"

Is this a bad thing? Not necessarily. There were no video games in Germany during World War II (despite the tons of games that are *based on* World War II), and you'd be hard pressed to tell us that the world is more violent now than it was at any other point in its history.

And on that note, enjoy this Painkiller review.—*D-Pad Destroyer*

Painkiller

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The past few years have seen the first-person shooter evolve away from its original roots. Gone are the days of the monsters-heading-right-for-you game; squad-based military missions or games in which running and hiding are just as important as shooting and shooting. Painkiller reaches back to a simple time, and it does so with such panache that you'd be forgiven for thinking it's one of the coolest shooters in years.

They're Coming Right for Us!

Painkiller's story: You died, yadda yadda yadda, you're stuck between Heaven and Hell. Now blow stuff up. Okay, it's a little more complex than that but not much. Each level consists of environments to explore and monsters to kill, and the handy-dandy radar takes most of the guesswork out of the exploration. At heart, it's a simple, fast, pounding shooter that doesn't apologize for being packed with action and low on brains.

PROTIP: To kill Lucifer, kill enough ghosts to enter Demon mode. Wait for him to bring rocks from the sky and then shoot the rocks back at him. If you hit him, he'll double over and toss his sword at you. Shoot the sword back at him, and he's toast.

But wait; before you go thinking Painkiller's completely mindless, you have to consider the bosses. The generals of Hell won't be brought down as easily as their minions, right? So each massive boss encounter is a self-contained puzzle for you to solve with no clues as to how to do it. It's refreshing in a "figure it out yourself" way, and when you finally bring down that 100-foot-tall beast, you feel like you've accomplished something. The waves of bad guys before the bosses vary from evil monks who run right at you to skull-headed demons that grab their own allies for use as (in)human shields. It gets repetitive toward the end, but it's tons of fun up until then.

One of the most lovingly crafted games in years, Painkiller looks awesome, sounds intimidating, and controls simply and smoothly. The game's five distinct weapons manage to cover the essentials (rocket launcher, mini-gun, shotgun) while offering some unique innovations. The coolest is the Painkiller, a sort of chainsaw/laser tripwire combo that enables you to mow through crowds or set up traps for oncoming enemies. Once you collect enough souls (left behind by slain enemies), you turn into a demon and go into complete ass-kicking mode, which gives you a shockwave attack that instantly vaporizes any enemy it hits.

PROTIP: If you find yourself close to morphing into Demon mode (a.k.a. heinous ass-kicking mode), try not to collect any souls until you begin your next big battle. Morphing at the end of a wave wastes your power.

PROTIP: The Painkiller's alt-fire is the best weapon in the game. You can kill enemies with the yo-yo-like probe or create a laser tripwire that will kill anything that walks through it.

A Bit of the Ultra-Violence

It's refreshing to see a game that makes no apologies for putting you in a room with hundreds of bad guys just to see what happens. Painkiller might not be overly smart or innovative, but it's damn cool, and that just rocks.

—*D-Pad Destroyer*

M ■ Developed by People Can Fly ■ Published by DreamCatcher Interactive ■ $39.99 ■ Available now ■ Action ■ 16 players

PC	GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR 4.0
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	5.0	

Recommended System Specifications
■ Windows 98/ME/2000/XP ■ Pentium 4 2.4 GHz ■ 512 MB RAM ■ 1.2 GB on HD ■ 128 MB video card

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"Why I may never play Battlefield 1942 again"

– PC GAMER, March 2004

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World of Warcraft

Knowing that World of Warcraft is on its way is like knowing that Peter Jackson is about to do the next Star Wars movie: You know it's going to be awesome, but you're not sure exactly what to expect. After a few hours (all right, a *lot* of hours) spent playing WOW, it's pretty clear that Blizzard's putting as much care into this as it does just about every other game it makes.

Zug Zug

Blizzard made a gutsy move with its beta: It removed the NDA (nondisclosure agreement) early on, enabling players to talk freely about the still unfinished game they were playing. It's pretty clear why Blizzard did that, though, because the game is already frightfully stable and polished. At press time, we could play only the Alliance races (humans, dwarves, night elves, and gnomes), and just that slice of the world was wonderful and new. Not only does WOW feature an art design philosophy that makes other MMOs look like they *had* no art design philosophy, but WOW also claims one of the most user-friendly quest systems in the business. For the first eight or nine levels, you will almost always have a quest to do, giving you a focus as you learn the ropes. Meanwhile, the graphics drip with personality, and the game world seems more lush and cool than just about any MMO world out there.

While awesome in so many ways, the WOW beta disappoints in a few. The game ignores some of the advances other games have made in the genre, such as locked encounters and measures to control spawn camping. While downtime in WOW is almost nonexistent (health and energy regenerate quickly between combats), you'll still find yourself camping and competing with other players for valuable quest monsters. Also somewhat disappointing is the apparent lack of variety among members of the same class, and because Alliance and Horde characters cannot group together, the game's eight races practically dwindle to four with the other four races essentially off-limits.

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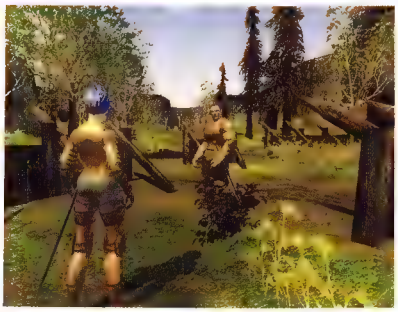
An Accurate Acronym

That said, WOW commands attention from MMO fans and rewards them with a rich and stylish game experience. Even though it's still in beta, it's become the MMO of choice among several *GamePro* editors. It will be interesting to see what happens when it launches for real.
—*Dunjin Master*

■ **Hands-On** ■ **Developed and published by Blizzard Entertainment** ■ **Target release date: Summer 2004**

EverQuest II

Seeing EverQuest II for the first time at last year's E3 was a revelation, but some questions nagged us: Could an MMORPG really look that good? Could Sony Online really remove itself from the established weirdness of EverQuest to produce something that's not only different but also better?



You Have Become Better at MMORPG Design (201)!

We played EQII at the EverQuest Fan Faire in Las Vegas in front of a crowd of jealous, plotting EverQuest fans. Despite the fact that we got in for free and the Faire attendees paid tons of money to be there, we had a good, solid four hours or so with the game, and with some exceptions, it's fair to say that the answers to the above questions are in the affirmative.

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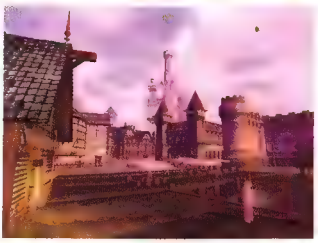
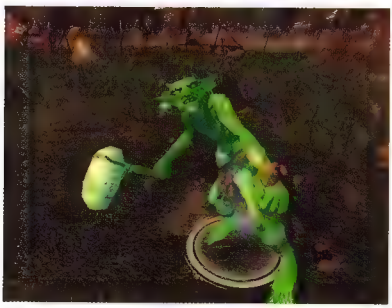
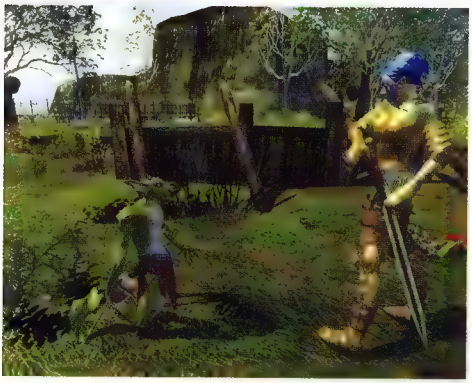
Working under the belief that MMOs had to be graphically simpler than the average contemporary single-player game, EQII players will find their expectations trounced in the first moments of the game. The early version included a ship-board tutorial that not only introduced the basic concepts of the game (how to speak to NPCs, buy things from merchants, and kill monsters and take their stuff) but also the cool graphical tricks EQII's designers are using.





Besides the sweet graphical look, the game itself is actually quite different from the EQ some of you know and love. Emphasis is now on small encounters rather than huge raids, and once you engage an enemy, you're locked into that fight until one of you dies. No one can attack your foe unless you call for help, but in doing so, you surrender any reward for the fight in exchange for an increased chance of survival. This keeps kill-stealing to a minimum while also emphasizing pre-encounter preparedness—magic users can no longer sit and regain mana during a combat, so they have to fight smarter while the battles are going on.



BetterQuest

In the version we played, there were a few snags. Low frame rates made the game chunky when tons of characters were around, and on some PCs, the visual options had to be rolled back quite a bit, even with 512 MB of RAM. Still, those are the things developers fix last, so you can expect the game to perform better when it launches this fall.—*Dunjin Master*

- **Hands-On**
- **Developed and published by Sony Online Entertainment**
- **Target release date: Fall 2004**

SHREK 2

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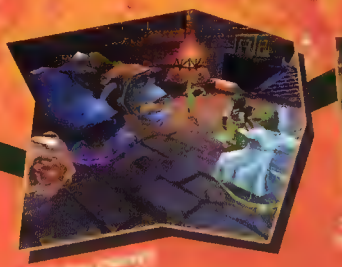
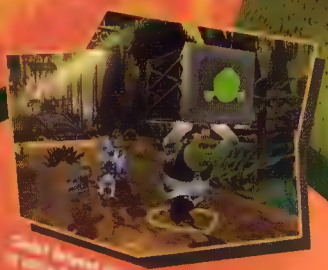




PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

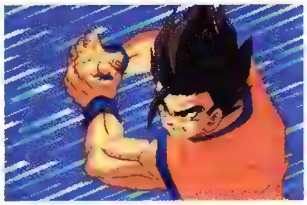
EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Comic Mischief
Violence

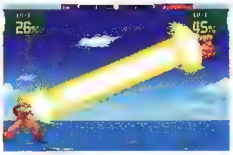
Screenshots taken from PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system gameplay.

All trade names are the properties of their respective owners.

Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors



Undaunted by the universally harsh panning last year's Dragon Ball Z: Taiketsu got for being a pathetically shallow fighter with limited movesets, poor fighter balance, and jerky animation, Atari is in the process of localizing Dragon Ball Z: Bukuu Tougeki for a U.S. release this June. Developer Banpresto (creator of three Japanese DBZ coin-ops in the mid-1990s) is promising much better graphics and more advanced fighting techniques with a stronger focus on aerial combat, combos, and signature special attacks than previous DBZ carts. Even better, Supersonic will showcase a vast array of characters, a robust amount of gameplay modes, and three-on-three tag-team battles à la Marvel vs. Capcom. The Japanese version has hit and is getting killer reviews for its detailed graphics and success in capturing the manic thrills of the show's battles, so you can expect the U.S. release to be gangbusters as well. *—Iron Monkey*

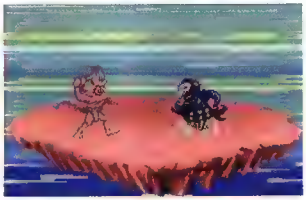


- First Look
- Developed by Banpresto
- Published by Atari
- Target release date: June

Duel Masters: Sempai Legends

Based on a comic book that is based on a cartoon that is based on a trading-card game in Japan, Duel Masters: Sempai Legends puts you in the role of a junior card duelist who must reclaim a powerful card stolen from his grandfather, a legendary fighter. During your quest, you'll traverse and explore towns, villages, and arenas while interacting with characters from the show and collecting and trading valuable collectable cards to use against other duelists in battle. Because the trading-card game has yet to hit America (its release will coincide with the video game and cartoon), a tutorial mode will introduce players to the rules that govern both the trading-card and video game. The cards themselves will contain 180 creatures and spells, and two players can go toe to toe via a link cable.*—Iron Monkey*

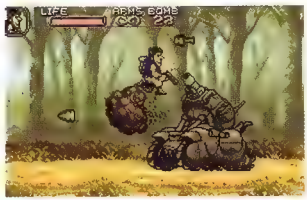
- First Look
- Developed by Mistic
- Published by Atari
- Target release date: June

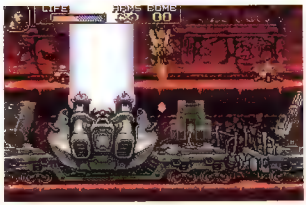


Metal Slug Advance

Metal Slug, SNK's symphonic ode to single-minded, almost Zen-like wanton militaristic destruction, makes a logical jump to handheld territory in an all-new all-out assault on your synapses and free time. Showcasing five huge missions rife with hidden routes to take, secret rooms to find, mazes to navigate, plenty of rifle fodder to expunge, and hostages to rescue, Metal Slug Advance is designed to appeal to the well-intentioned wee-little warmongering curmudgeon inside of you. New to the fan-favorite series are over 100 Metal Slug E-cards, which reconfigure the status of your character as they are collected and add a strategic layer to the action-heavy gameplay. Sounds like a cool feature, but will it be enough to make up for the fact that Metal Slug Advance will be only a single-player game?*—Iron Monkey*

- First Look
- Developed and published by SNK
- Target release date: 2004





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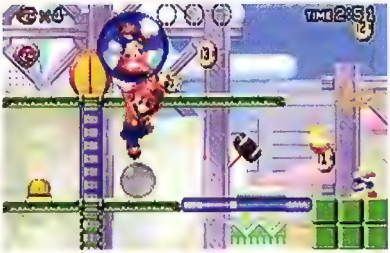
Mario vs. Donkey Kong

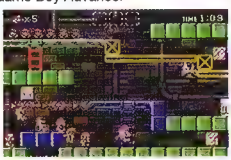
Jekyll and Hyde, Taylor and Dr. Zaius—the struggle between man and his savage self has struck a chord with anybody who has suffered internal conflict between the repressive demands of civilized society and the often times unbearable urge to immediately satisfy oneself. Hence, playing any game that pits man against monkey is always a morally ambivalent experience. Who among you can say that, if given the chance, you wouldn't tear off your clothes, drop down to all fours, grab a gal and some bananas, and climb the nearest tree or skyscraper were it not illegal?

The two-decade feud between Mario and Donkey Kong—begun when the two self-destructively vied for the cross-species affection of doe-eyed Pauline—not only addresses the conflict between ego and id, but it is also what the modern platform game has predicated itself upon. It's fitting that Mario vs. Donkey Kong's release coincides with the re-release of the original Donkey Kong on the Game Boy Advance.



Thanks to some very choice graphics, Mario's never looked this good so small.

The latest chapter in their quarrelsome saga begins when Donkey Kong, possessed by TV-induced consumer rage, breaks into Mario's toy factory and steals dozens of little wind-up Mario 'bots. The erstwhile kidnapper-turned-kleptomaniac absconds with said toys, and Mario has to track the bad, bad monkey through factories, jungle lairs, spooked houses, and volcanoes while avoiding traps that the guileful gorilla gleefully sets.



Flee, flee, Mario, before your children catch you and eat you!

PROTIP: Though Donkey Kong likes to eat bananas, he doesn't like to get hit in the head with 'em.

The game is a synergistic gene-splicing of classic Nintendo side-scrolling platformers with strands of recent fare as Mario can wield a hammer as he did in the original Donkey Kong, herd Pikmin-like mini-Marios through jigsaw environments, climb and slide along chains and vines like Donkey Kong, Jr., and take occasional breaks for Wario Ware–style five-second mini-games. But for all the genre-requisite spike avoiding, platform hopping, and ghost dodging, the stars here are the levels themselves. They are, in essence, entire puzzles to be solved by leading Mario mites into toy chests, finding keys, and backflipping onto triggers that make some walls or walkways materialize from the ether, and others magically disappear. Me likes.—*Dr. Chapstick*

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR 4.5
SOUND	4.5	
CONTROL	4.5	

E ■ Developed and published by Nintendo ■ $34.99 ■ Available now ■ Action ■ 1 player

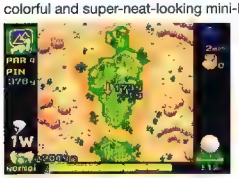
Mario Golf: Advance Tour

PROTIP: If you come across a Mario enemy hiding in a Practice Range, be sure to hit it with a golf ball. There's a good chance it's carrying a Custom Ticket that earns you a set of specialty clubs at the "blacksmith."

Who'd have thought that combining golf with a Japanese-style role-playing game would actually be a good idea? Apparently Camelot, the developer of the latest handheld incarnation of Mario Golf, did—and weirdly enough, it was absolutely right.

A Saga of Wood and Iron

The most surprising feature of Mario Golf: Advance Tour is its fully fleshed, glorious Story mode, a colorful and super-neat-looking mini-RPG that has you wandering around a fantasy golf universe, entering houses, chatting with characters, and finding new courses on your way to ultimate golf mastery and the Links Tournament. It looks and feels like a real old-school Japanese RPG (a lot like Golden Sun, actually—no surprise as Camelot developed that game, too). In addition to the "main quest" of winning all the tournaments, the game features numerous "side-quests" to find and tackle, such as putting and driving challenges, and a special "slot machine" course that has you trying to make par using only three random clubs. All of these challenges are fun and spiritually fulfilling, and there's the added incentive of earning extra experience points for completing each one.



PROTIP: If you hold down the B button while lining up a shot, you can see the trajectory results of hitting the ball at different impact points.

The Story mode also has one of the best golf tutorials around as characters in the Practice Area give you challenges in exchange for experience points. Hell, you may actually learn something applicable to golfing in real life once the mysteries of the approach shot are revealed. The only thing that's confusing is the level-up screen; it's hard to determine whether putting points in areas like draw/fade or height is a good thing or a bad thing, and the jumble of bars and sub-bars doesn't help.

PROTIP: Doubles is hard as your partner makes inevitably worse shots than you do—level up your partner higher than yourself to compensate. Focus on Impact and Control.

Mario is Missing!

The biggest thing that may disappoint Nintendo fans is the lack of Mario in the Story mode. While the plumber and his friends are selectable in the good selection of quick games and multiplayer modes, you spend the bulk of your golf time using some generic little kid with a hat, golfing against other generic little kids with hats. A little more character would have been welcome in this otherwise wonderfully wide world of sports.—*Star Dingo*

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR 4.5
SOUND	4.0	
CONTROL	4.5	

E ■ Developed by Camelot ■ Published by Nintendo ■ $39.99 ■ Available June ■ Golf ■ 4 players

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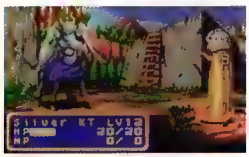
Shining Force:

Resurrection of the Dark Dragon

If you love Final Fantasy Tactics Advance and can't get enough Fire Emblem, then check out Shining Force. It's (mostly) an exact replica of the Sega Genesis cult hit, an extraordinary game that introduced the concept of strategy/RPGs to the U.S. console audience. But time passes, things evolve, and that which was once great and glorious doesn't always shine quite as bright in the present tense.



PROTIP: If you have Yogurt deliver the final blow on an enemy with 1 HP, he'll drop something really, er, interesting....

Shining Force's biggest strengths are its setting, a delightfully half-serious anime fantasy world, and some of the most memorable, weirdest characters (jellyfish, armadillos, crash-test moles) you'll ever amass for an army. There are even a few new ones that appear in brand-new "epilogue" missions before joining your team proper, including a shamanistic princess, a ninja bug, and a strange zombie that wields cards (it's cooler than you think).

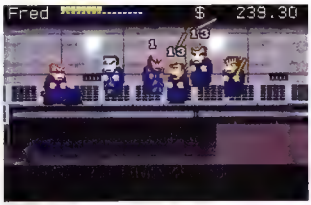
The game does show its age: There's no giant world to explore (later fixed in the superior Shining Force II), the characters are unbalanced, and leveling up too often involves replaying the same maps over and over again. The strategy and classes have nowhere near the complexity of Final Fantasy Tactics Advance, and the graphics have been trumped by games like Golden Sun. But Shining Force is still a damn fine game of fantasy chess, even if it's since been surpassed by its successors.—*Star Dingo*

T
- Developed by Sega/Amusement Vision
- Published by Atlus
- $29.99 - Available June
- Strategy/RPG - 1 player

GRAPHICS	3.5	FUN FACTOR
SOUND	3.5	4.0
CONTROL	4.0	

River City Ransom EX

River City Ransom EX is a radically enhanced version of the cult classic NES side-scrolling fighter that tries to be faithful to its progenitor roots. In RCREX, you can still play as Ryan or Alex, but the game's real allure is customizing your own characters and recruiting a three-deep hoodlum posse of your own. Players can customize everything from characters' physical appearances to NPC A.I. to in-game physics. RCREX even has a feature that lets you merge data with boss characters, enabling you to take on their special techniques as your own.



PROTIP: When there's too much going on around you, run away from the melee to get your bearings.

Unfortunately, the original formula of super-deformed deviant tiny boppers and gameplay variety loses its charm amiss all the new enhancements and customizations. Many of the new techniques look cool, but they're way too powerful. Once you've earned enough money to buy a few techniques, the game is essentially over. There isn't any incentive to build up and customize your characters at all.

Despite the flaw, River City Ransom EX is a decent addition to the handheld fighter genre, and if players can discipline themselves not to buy many of the all-powerful techniques, RCREX can be a cool gaming experience.—*Rice Burner*

E
- Developed and published by Atlus
- $29.99 - Available June
- Action/fighting - 2 players

GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR
SOUND	4.0	4.0
CONTROL	4.0	

Classic NES Series: Super Mario Bros.

Wielding a wild imagination fueled by a childhood spent traipsing countryside hilltops and exploring hidden caves, as well as a steady diet of puppet shows and Noh theater, Nintendo's resident wonder-elf, Shigeru Miyamoto, crafted this benchmark game that sold bales of NES systems and against which all subsequent platformers would be measured.

1986: The epic battles of the brothers Mario begin when crust-punk tortoise King Bowser invades the Mushroom Kingdom with paramilitary Goombas, crackshot Koopa coalitions, underwater cadres of butt-chomping Cheep Cheeps, and anthropomorphic assassin missiles. The titular twin plumbers vie against the occupation forces while wolfing growth-inducing mushrooms and noshing fireball flowers in a Crayola-bombed fantasia inspired by vintage *Star Trek* reruns and *Alice in Wonderland* books where sewer pipes lead to secret worlds, empty spaces yield warpways to other dimensions, and demonic snapping turtles guard purgatories of exploding lava and rotating fire chains.

SMB's insane worlds, which beg exploration and conceptual absurdities, are anchored by intuitive controls and an innovative use of jump and slide physics, and midleap bending, culminating in a pinnacle of game design that redefined how video games were played.—*Dr. Chapstick*

Mario got duped again. That's right—duped.

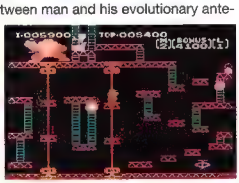
E
- Developed and published by Nintendo
- $19.99 - Available June
- Action - 2 players

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR
SOUND	4.5	4.5
CONTROL	4.5	

Classic NES Series: Donkey Kong

Shigeru Miyamoto's seminal permutation of the King Kong legend and progenitor of the modern platformer uses never-before-achieved gameplay elegance as a vehicle to deliver an allegory of the everyman's struggle to overcome life's obstacles armed only with his wit, skills, and a steadfast focus on the goal at hand. Unfinished architectural arenas are where this mythical confrontation between man and his evolutionary antecedent play out as blue-collar Mario prototype Jumpman runs, leaps, climbs, and smashes his way up ramps, tilted beams, and skewed girders while contending with elevators, conveyor belts, and fire goblins to rescue his sweet sugar from a barrel-hurling mutant monkey god.



Jumpman staggers along, trying to concentrate his energy on running, never thinking of any other escape than simply going forward.

Clever gameplay is propelled by progressively increasing difficulty, while completing the levels speak of the game's Kafka-esque underpinnings as Jumpman, after conquering surreal environments and surmounting grave dangers, continually achieves hollow victory after hollow victory when the surly simian once again takes his Fay Wray away. So why the three out of five? 'Cause the $20 price tag is a lot to ask considering that this NES port is missing the cement factory level, and you can get the e-Reader version for a fraction of the price.—*Dr. Chapstick*

E
- Developed and published by Nintendo
- $19.99 - Available June
- Action - 2 players

GRAPHICS	3.5	FUN FACTOR
SOUND	3.5	3.0
CONTROL	4.0	

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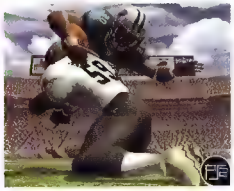
Madden NFL 2005

For the 2005 season, Madden football's focus turns to defense. Developer EA Sports Tiburon is working on a bunch of improvements, including more player-controlled defensive schemes, improved coverage audibles, and even some individual move controls to make that side of the ball more fun to play.



Stick It to the Offense

For years, defense has battled offensive trickery with mere audibles, but now you can mix things up to keep the offense on its toes. A new hot routes–style feature enables you to change defensive assignments on the fly to initiate tactics like flat zone coverages, hook zone coverages, blitzing the QB, or the QB spy. Also, coverage audibles can make individual players play tighter or deeper, and you can contain star players by assigning defenders to shadow him.

Once the play starts, the new "hit stick" unleashes monster tackles. Flick the right analog stick (direction doesn't matter, just timing—it's more like a button), and your player leaves his feet to deliver a brutal hit with an increased chance of causing a fumble. Of course, if you miss, you flop to the turf and out of the play. Stripping the ball is also more effective—you can hold the button down without making your player's hands twitch spastically—to club the ball from behind or punch up to knock it loose.

On the A.I. side, defenders play with better positioning and more awareness of what their teammates are doing, so they'll cover different angles of a play rather than all running to the same spot. Lastly, Tiburon is adding auto assists that help you get to the right spot, take the right pursuit angle, or strafe automatically.

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Good-Looking Defense

Visually, the game benefits most noticeably from refinements to the lighting and player models. Player's bodies are much more defined with shoulders and arm muscles more accurately proportioned. Jerseys wrinkle and move more realistically, losing that plastic-action-figure feel of years past. New animations provide more types of sacks and slick refinements, such as making players hop over piles once a play is dead. There are few sure things in life, but Madden is almost always one of them, and Tiburon looks like it's doing a fine job of earning that trust again this season.—*Air Hendrix*

■ **Update** ■ **Developed by EA Tiburon**
■ **Published by EA Sports** ■ **Target release date: August**

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ESPN NFL 2005

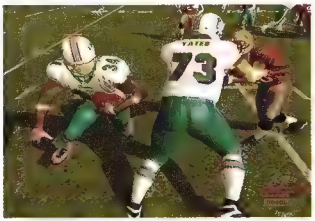
In its perennial battle with Madden football, developer Visual Concepts doesn't hold back in its efforts to improve the feature set in ESPN football. This season, if you had to measure the balance between show and go in ESPN NFL 2005, you'd probably give the edge ever so slightly to the "show."

Broadcast Quality

Be prepared to feast your eyes as player models and field visuals take another evolutionary step forward. By using a technique called triple-pass rendering, NFL 2005's game engine can draw fine details onto characters, such as the movement of the jerseys across skin and the ripple of muscles on bone. Field views receive added perspective from a sky cam, just like ESPN's real-life televised games.

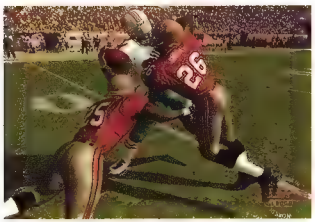
Weather effects will do more than just look good. A new repertoire of character animations teamed with improved artificial intelligence will make players react more convincingly to adverse field conditions, including slipping and sliding in rain and snow.

Also joining the graphics show will be a virtual Chris Berman. Now Visual Concepts can make ESPN's star broadcaster do anything it wants him to like performing on-camera analysis of specific team matchups and hosting a halftime show with highlights based on your actual gameplay. ESPN's sideline reporter, Susie Kolber, is also on hand to conduct real-time interviews with players during your game. You can take part in the festivities, too, with a new celebrations editor that sets up to four of 40 classic end-zone dances to any of the action buttons.



Fighting for Extra Yardage

Gameplay also puts on some extra muscle. On defense, the game features a brand-new tackling system that enables you to reach out for hand tackles and hold on for wrap tackles. Of course, ballcarriers aren't down until they're down, so they can try to wriggle free or slip tackles, too.



If you want to get into some serious game planning, you can use one of the numerous Franchise mode improvements like the ability to prepare players for the game during the week. After studying your upcoming opponent's tendencies, you can make individual players like your star running back or receiver, or groups of players like the defensive backs improve their abilities to run certain plays. During practice, you allocate a set number of hours to specific skills or schemes, and by game day, your guys are ready.

Preseason Predictions

This preview version has officially crossed into tip-o-the-iceberg status as far as improvements go, and even returning favorites like first-person-perspective mode, the Crib, and online gameplay will all enjoy major upgrades. It certainly appears that ESPN NFL 2005 is preparing for a championship season.—*Eye Spy*

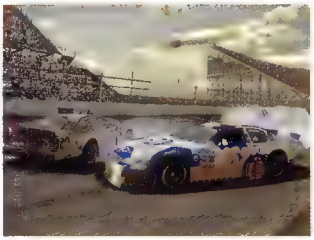
■ **Update** ■ **Developed by Visual Concepts** ■ **Published by ESPN Videogames**
■ **Target release date: August**

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.

NASCAR Thunder 2005

EA Sports' big goal with NASCAR Thunder 2005 is to make a game that appeals to all racing fans, not just the NASCAR faithful, and its impressive new approach should manage just that. This year's edition revolves around the lifestyle of a star driver as you evolve from a no-name rookie to do battle with the Nextel Cup's biggest names—and egos. Your career begins by creating your driver and earning a berth on the NASCAR Modified circuit, where you tackle regional series all over the country, fine-tuning your skills in high-speed cars with fairly easy handling. But you don't have to just serve time until you're called up to the Craftsman Truck, Busch, and eventually the Nextel Cup—after a few wins, you'll be invited to a test session in the next series above you. If you make a good impression, you'll be a substitute driver that season or get an offer later on. Better yet, you can progress through your career as a driver/owner or simply as a driver if you don't want to muddle through the details of staffing, sponsorships, and so on. Once you earn a reputation as a hero or villain driver in the NASCAR soap opera, you can start earning revenue from T-shirts, bobbleheads, and more.

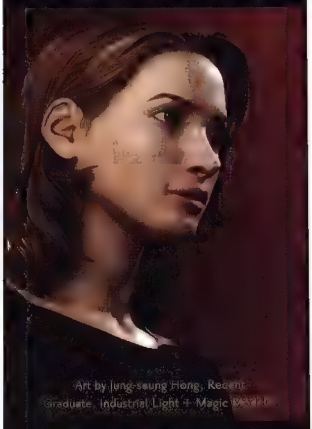
Last year's popular grudges and alliances are getting a boost with the addition of an Intimidation button—instead of drafting politely, this lets you really ride an opponent's bumper in an attempt to unnerve him. If things get too rowdy, you can settle things in a post-race confrontation—or apology. Other little details are also being improved, ranging from a better sense of speed to preventing cheap passes on the apron to sponsorships organized as packages. Online competition is being bumped up to four-player, and the handling's being smoothed out to actually be survivable even without assists. From the small details to the big picture, the Thunder series is getting a thoughtful overhaul that should really pay off for race fans.—*Air Hendrix*



■ **Update** ■ **Developed by EA Tiburon**
■ **Published by EA Sports** ■ **Target release date: September**

These concept screens are from the development system and don't represent a specific platform.

ANIMATION & COMPUTER ARTS



Art by Jung-seung Hong, Recent Graduate, Industrial Light + Magic

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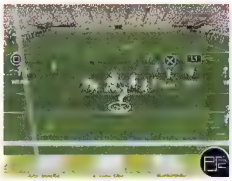
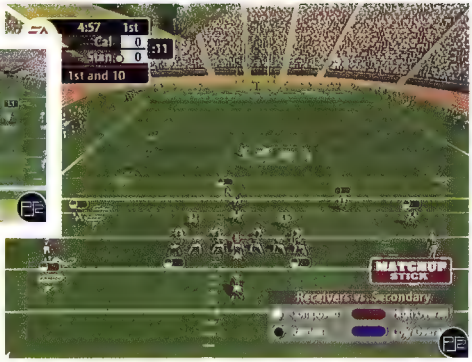
NCAA Football 2005

When you blister the thumbs of sports fans several summers in a row, it's hard to fathom how that winning streak can continue, but EA Sports has another phenomenal season in the works with NCAA Football 2005.

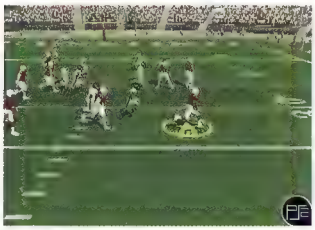


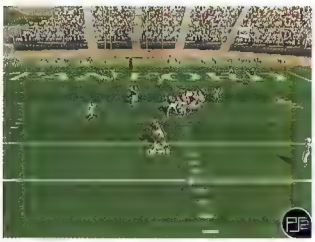


National Champ

The biggest new addition is the focus on home-field advantage, and it really ignites the game's college roots, distinguishing it as no mere "NFL Lite." Home crowds will get loud in key situations and even louder for big rivalries, which causes the screen to shake and the controller to rumble distractingly. As the players can't communicate, audibles may become impossible, QBs may line up behind the wrong lineman, and false starts will happen more frequently.

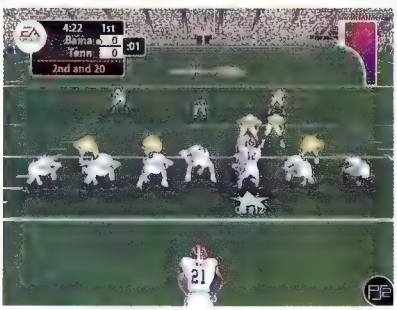
But this effect is also a weapon you can deploy to your advantage using the L2 button and the Match Up Stick, also known as the right analog stick. Pounding the L2 button Track and Field–style jacks up the crowd, while flicking the right analog stick in different directions gives you key matchups like receivers vs. secondary, showing both who's more skilled and who's more composed. This new Composure rating is now a big factor in the action—as Composure plummets, so do all a player's ratings, so he'll keep fumbling or dropping passes. This addition creates a whole new layer of strategy in the game as you find weaknesses to exploit in your opponent—it's pretty ingenious, actually.





Heisman Winner

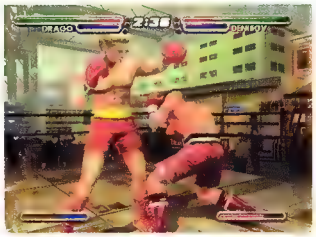
NCAA also packs in an impressive roster of smaller refinements. Probably the most fun will be had from the new create-a-sign option, which lets you write your own text for a sign that a fan in the stands will hold up. Long-time fans will welcome the addition of custom playoffs and a new camera on kickoffs that flips sides before the ball is kicked. You'll also find new defensive plays like the 3-2-5 or 4-2-5, while zones are played better and safeties react more intelligently. Certain star players will also be rated as agile runners, which lets them cut more sharply and hit little seams more easily—the difference was immediately noticeable and huge.

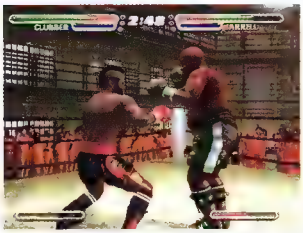


In the popular Dynasty mode, you'll have a much richer experience, leading off with player skills that go up or down week to week. Coaches will have a lot more to contend with as players can transfer to other schools if they're unhappy or get busted for skipping classes, which can make headlines on a *Sports Illustrated* cover. When recruiting, you can even now chase nonfootball athletes like track stars and make them receivers. With all this going on in training camp, NCAA Football is bound for stardom once again.—*Air Hendrix*

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by EA Tiburon ■ Published by EA Sports ■ Target release date: July

Rocky Legends





Despite being older than most of you, the legendary Philly street brawler turned world champ boxer still sets an example of how to swing both fists through an exceptionally hard-knock life. Rocky also shows us that brawn can go the distance against any beauty. The first game to follow the movie series classic was only a mild success, but it certainly produced some fun moments. In the prequel, Rocky Legends, not only can you play as bruiser Balboa again, but you can also now follow the turbulent careers of Apollo Creed, Clubber Lang, and Ivan Drago. You can choose from over 40 pugilists, including 26 new boxers, and earn your ranking in 20 venues, such as the docks or a Russian training camp. Xbox players can duke it out online, too.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

- **First Look**
- **Developed and published by Ubisoft**
- **Target release date: October**

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.

Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2

Okay, so playing a tennis game can be described as playing an advanced version of Pong. But once you mix in the intricacies of this demanding racquet sport, tennis is simply addicting. Unfortunately, the first Smash Court didn't quite fulfill that addiction, but this year, Namco hopes to change things around with the sequel. These early screen shots already show much visual improvement, and with the ability to choose from 16 male and female pros, including Serena Williams and Andy Roddick, the court has the potential to be an exciting place. Added to the realism are fully licensed grand slam tournaments you can play in, such as Wimbledon, the French Open, and the U.S. Open. If Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2 manages to fix last year's intolerable control scheme, the game just might be a smashing success.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

- **First Look**
- **Developed and published by Namco**
- **Target release date: Summer 2004**

IndyCar Series 2005

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Although the Indy Racing League is considered to be a low-tier racing alliance compared to CART and Formula One, it still possesses what many race junkies enjoy: a high-speed adrenaline rush. This year's IndyCar Series once again gives speedsters complete access to IRL's top drivers like Gil de Ferran and Helio Castroneves in an open-wheel simulation that will have you flying around oval tracks at very high speeds. There are 15 official courses offered, including the famed Indianapolis Motor Speedway and the Twin Ring Motegi Speedway in Japan. This time around, the game can support third-party steering wheels, plus you can go head-to-head online with up to 12 drivers simultaneously. The early version of IndyCar Series 2005 still needed a lot of visual polish, but the controls were already calibrated for a smooth ride.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

- **Hands-On**
- **Developed and published by Codemasters**
- **Target release date: May**

MLB SlugFest Loaded

SlugFest Loaded is a solid baseball game that literally doesn't hold back any punches.

MLB SlugFest Loaded is a brash and blustery game that mixes just enough zaniness into America's classic sport to make purists cringe and casual ballplayers curious. That Major League Baseball was relaxed enough with this license to allow Nomar Garciaparra to knee Derek Jeter in the sweet spot (and vice versa) or Eric Gagne to tattoo hitters without mercy is either disturbing or refreshing depending on your sense of tradition. Of course, it's all this clowning around that enables Loaded to field a decent game of something like baseball.

PROTIP: The Home Run Derby is a good place to develop the timing of your swing. In this game, you must become a patient batter.

Ballplayers Behaving Badly

The MLB license means all the big-league teams and players are here minus a few fee-conscious superstars like a certain Mr. Bonds from San Francisco, who doesn't realize all the fun he's missing out on—or maybe he does. However, Sammy Sosa—of the Cubs and corkage—is perfect as SlugFest's "box" star.

Loaded puts on an entertaining show, getting good mileage from some shameless attitude. The Xbox and PS2 graphics both look fine with sharp player models, picturesque real-life fields, and solid gameplay animations. Much of the visual fun is in watching the batters pump up the crowd. It's a kick to see chest pounding and finger jabbing from traditional blocks of stone like Vladimir Guerrero, Jeff Bagwell, or Ichiro Suzuki.

PROTIP: Use fastballs and hard sliders inside to set up your changeup away and at the outside corner.

The audio enjoys a big boost from comedic commentary by Tim Kitzrow and Jim Shorts (get it?). Their smart-ass observations and off-the-wall asides make theirs the best ballpark banter of any game. The crowd is also raucous and rowdy, making even the Brewers versus Blue Jays feel like WrestleMania.

PROTIP: When you field a ground ball in the outfield try to come up throwing. If you're quick, you can sometimes make a play on a base runner.

Fast, Furious, and Franchise

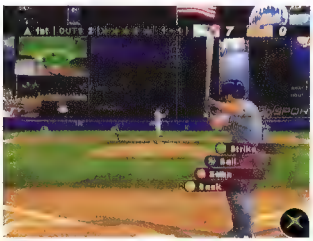
The pitching and batting interfaces are simple and a snap to master by any standard. The PS2 controls edge out the Xbox's, if only for the inherently easier-to-use layout. But this is not a game for nuances and the finer points of baseball. Basically, single-button presses activate a big swing, contact swing, and bunt. Pitchers all draw from the same repertoire, but they can also activate unique trick pitches during a game.

PROTIP: Toss your trick pitch as soon as you can. It should be good for a foul ball or a called strike.

PROTIP: Watch out for base runners, particularly those controlled by the artificial intelligence who try to slug your defender to knock the ball out of his hands.

And SlugFest is all about the tricks. Pitched balls whiz around like insane mosquitoes or literally burn through the air like bats out of Hell. Base runners can put on a turbo boost to beat out throws or just beat on the fielders once they reach a bag.

For gamers who really want to live in this bizarro world of baseball, Loaded introduces a new Franchise mode. It's basic stuff and easy to use, and it won't overwhelm average fans with too many decision. But from here you can make blockbuster trades, bring up minor leaguers, set up your rotation and batting order, and manage your strategy. If playing a maniac MLB season doesn't grab you, you might be motivated to unlock surprise teams like the Bobble Heads, the Evil Clowns, or even the Sub-Zeros or the Scorpions (yup, Mortal Kombat lives).



PROTIP: Work your pitcher's slider and/or curve up high in the strike zone. That's often good for a strike-inducing foul ball.

The Cooperstown Follies

With all the over-the-top gameplay and player histrionics, MLB SlugFest Loaded generally feels more like the weekend softball league than the Major League. This is no sim by any stretch, even with the new Franchise mode. Still, it is a decent game of belligerent baseball with mindless fun and laughs for anybody looking to play two—whether that's a doubleheader or just a deuce of innings.—*Atomic Dawg*

E ■ Developed by Point of View ■ Published by Midway Sports ■ $39.99 ■ Available June ■ Baseball ■ 4 players

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 3.5
	SOUND	4.0	
	CONTROL	4.0	
XBOX	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 3.5
	SOUND	4.0	
	CONTROL	4.0	

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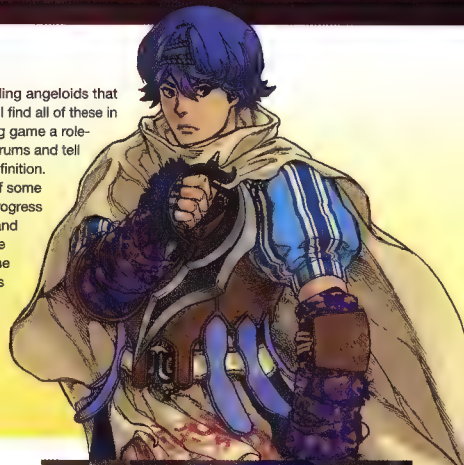
The Rules of Exile



Robots with interchangeable parts; lighthearted, cel-shaded fairy tales; card-battling angeloids that echo Final Fantasy; massively multiplayer online games that *are* Final Fantasy—you'll find all of these in the Role-Player's Realm section this month. But what, exactly, makes a role-playing game a role-playing game? We know you have your ideas (e-mail us or visit the GamePro.com forums and tell us what you think), but in the meantime, let's see if we can come up with our own definition.

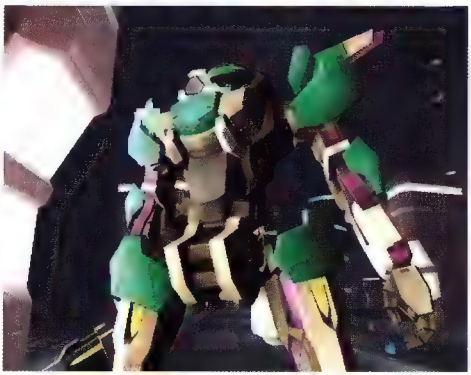
You can start with a few easy, basic rules: 1) Your character(s) have a stat sheet of some sort, and stats/skills increase as you gain some variation of experience points and progress through the game. 2) Your characters(s) have an inventory to manage, be it armor and swords or mech parts. You could stop there, but then anyone could fairly easily argue that Onimusha 3 is an RPG...and, well, *duh*, of course it's not. We can't say 3) that the combat is turn-based because that would eliminate games like Fable and even Knights of the Old Republic (real-time but you pause the game to issue commands). We could instead say 3) Your character(s) interact with other NPCs and take on a large number of quests and missions, but even then you're not safe (what, exactly, does "large" mean?). So why is Champions of Norrath (an action/RPG) a part of the realm while Deus Ex: Invisible War and The Legend of Zelda are exiled? In the end, it's a nebulous thing. A gut feeling. Instinct. Ironically enough, when you're talking about RPGs, there are no hard and fast rules.—*Star Dingo*

Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Bose

The long-awaited second installment of the budding sci-fi epic RPG Xenosaga is on its way. Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Bose will be a direct extension of the first Xenosaga story line and will hopefully reveal the answers to the cliffhanger mysteries left unsolved from the first installment. Episode II promises to uncover the mysteries concerning the true form of Chaos, the relationship between Shion and Jin, and Jr.'s connection to Momo, and to further reveal another facet to the mysterious Zohars artifact.

Episode II will feature the entire original cast from the first game. Shion, Kos-Mos, Chaos, Jr., Albedo, and Margulis will all be present, but the game will feature at least two new characters—Shion's brother Jin and a mysterious red-haired stranger. Also new to the Xenosaga universe will be two new larger mechs, the E.S. Asher and the E.S. Isaachar.

Gamers can expect the same mechanics as those of the first installment of this series with several fine-tuned tweaks and graphical redesigns. Episode II will feature an enhanced battle interface, more outdoor environments with weathering effects, and improved load times between adventure and battle modes. Character designs have been minutely altered from the first game and seem to be more physically mature.



The true mystery concerning Episode II is whether gamers will be able to take a more interactive role in this RPG sequel. The first game had over 30 hours of cinematic cut-scenes and a drastically linear path, which left players feeling like they were viewing a movie rather than playing a game. Xenosaga II is still in its preliminary stages, so stay tuned for future developments.—*Rice Burner*

■ **First Look** ■ **Developed by Monolith Soft**
■ **Published by Namco** ■ **Target release date: First Quarter 2005**

Tales of Symphonia

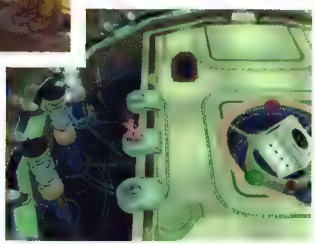
GameCube role-playing games are hard to come by, especially the big, epic, old-school kind imported from Japan. But Namco is making a valiant effort to change that with the release of Tales of Symphonia, a cel-shaded and ostensibly "cute" role-playing number about a boy, a Chosen, and why half-elves are more evil than whole elves.

The Chosen Many

But don't be fooled into thinking Tales is just a cutesy romp—inside the cel-shading, there's a remarkable amount of depth and sadness to the story line. The plot involves a young swordmaster named Lloyd who accompanies the Chosen (a half-angel girl named Colette) in her quest for the tower of regeneration, where she will balance the world and put an end to the tyranny of a bizarre, oppressive race of half-elves called the Desians. The writing in the preview build was especially good, playing off the game's own reliance on RPG clichés with some refreshingly self-effacing wit, and every important scene is voice acted.

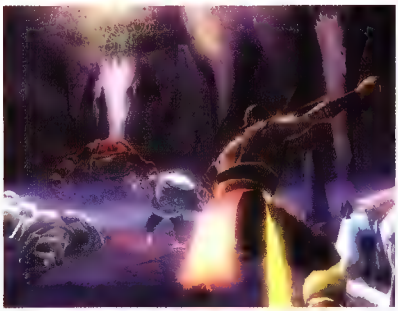
Alone in a Crowd

While most of the game's RPG elements are standard stuff, the battle system is notably odd: Although you can have a rather large party, you directly control only one character in real time, executing combos and special attacks not unlike in a more traditional action/fighting game. Your main attack is attached to the A button, and as you earn special attacks, you can assign them to different B-button and control-stick combinations. Everyone else in the party acts on autopilot unless you interrupt to give them a specific order (mostly when you want to heal). The game does give you the option to manually control everyone by constantly giving them battle orders if you like, but trust us—the battles are chaotic enough without having to worry about that. The game also includes two more weird quirks: cooking, which lets you make sandwiches and such between battles; and "titles," which can be assigned to characters to influence their growth path.



Tales of Symphonia is shaping up to be a GameCube role-player's dream, the massive saga you've been waiting for since the system launched. If Symphonia is a success, Namco plans on bringing out more of the long-running Tales series in the U.S.—*Star Dingo*

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by Namco Tales Studio
■ Published by Namco ■ Target release date: June



Jade Empire

Jade Empire is an epic tale that challenges you to perfect real-time martial arts skills and spell casting while making moral decisions whether to use your abilities for good or evil. BioWare's designed the game to tiptoe down the narrow path between action/fighter and RPG, and depending on which side of the tracks you like to live, it looks like it's doing a good job with both.

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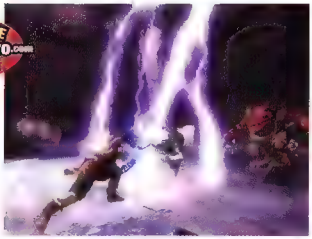
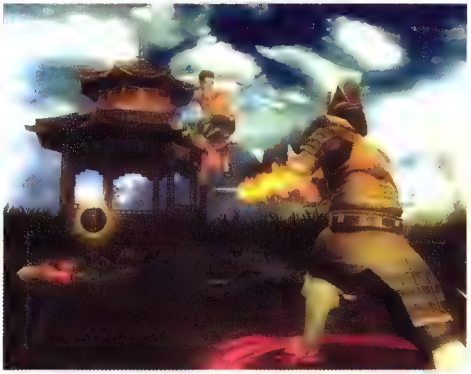


Once Upon a Time in China

BioWare blazed a role-playing trail with Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic, but Jade Empire utilizes a brand-new game engine. The story line plays out like a kung fu movie nestled in the myths and legends of ancient China. As a fledgling martial arts student, you're left in charge of the school when your master leaves to investigate the mysterious appearance of demons and ghosts in the local village.

Make-Believe Martial Arts

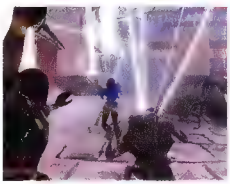
You decide to take off after him and build your martial arts and magic skills during the journey. After choosing one of the game's seven archetypes (fast guy, big guy, scantily-clad-but-very-skilled woman, etc.), you can learn up to 30 fighting styles, all modeled after but not representing actual kung fu. You can learn weapons techniques and magic, too. During the course of a fight, you can switch to any style on the fly to best your opponents, human and supernatural, and even learn transformation styles that turn you into fearsome mythical creatures.

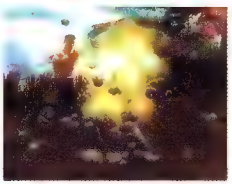


During the journey, you will interact with other characters and be given the opportunity to undertake side quests and other activities. The way you choose to accomplish these determines whether your character leans toward good or evil. That in turn influences your skills with light or dark magic and certain combat styles, and affects the way other people interact with you. You can even recruit disciples, who you can train as a school and then deploy to do your bidding.

Hidden Dragons

Developing a persona by learning hand-to-hand and weapons techniques, mastering magic skills, and hammering out a moral suit of armor should certainly appeal to most RPG gamers, but your thumbs should be prepared to sweat, too. Even at this early stage, Jade Empire sounds like a real gem.—*Undercover Lover*



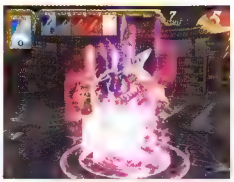


■ Update ■ Developed by BioWare ■ Published by Microsoft ■ Target release date: Fall 2004

Baten Kaitos

Card-battling games flow as freely as water these days, but here's one that actually managed to grab our attention. Developed by Monolith, the same folks responsible for Xenosaga, the GameCube-only Baten Kaitos follows the adventures of a young boy named Kalas, who lives among islands in a fantasy sky where everyone has wings. He soon meets up with the lovely Xelhas, and together they have to deal with a world in crisis and peril...well, what did you expect? In case you were wondering, the game's title refers to one of the four stars in the Zeta Cetus constellation—in Arabic, it means "belly of the sea monster."

The card-driven battle system involves a sort of fantasy five-card-draw poker as you try to play advantageously ordered groups of numbered and elementally aligned Magnus Cards against your foes in battle. Magnus Cards are acquired by imbuing blank cards with the "essence" of items you find. They can then replicate themselves for use in combat (as well as puzzle solving), and they age (often acquiring new traits) as time passes in the game. Sound a bit off the wall? Yeah, but that's what Japanese RPGs do best.—*Star Dingo*



■ First Look ■ Developed by Monolith
■ Published by Namco ■ Target release date: Winter 2004

Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne

Apocalyptic, nihilistic story lines with skinny-boy protagonists inexplicably chosen to determine the fate of the world are all the rave in the dark fringes of the Otaku world. From movies like *Akira* to TV shows like *Evangelion*, Japanese dig that melancholic theme, and Atlus continues to tap into that well with Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne.

The game is in post-apocalyptic Tokyo, and you have been given special powers by Lucifer to shape the new world that is to come. While that could sound like a new Peter Molyneux game, Nocturne is in reality a conventional Japanese console RPG with random turn-based battles reminiscent of Final Fantasy. However, there are a couple of unique twists, such as the ability to ask the enemy to join with you during battle and the freedom to role play your character, enabling you to see different endings by following ideologies of monotony, elitism, anarchism, chaos, destruction, or freedom (the game's all about thinking positive). You can also choose which stat to raise with level ups, so your character doesn't have to follow a specific mold.

Nocturne will be in its third installment for Japan as it has enjoyed a cult following there. With the franchise's stateside debut, you can expect the game to be readily embraced by those who don't belong to anime clubs, have pinups of Asuka, and do cosplay.—*Funky Zealot*

■ Hands-On ■ Developed and published by Atlus
■ Target release date: Third Quarter 2004

Final Fantasy XI

With a well of patience and a will of steel, there is nothing more you'll need.

Ponderous and slow, merciless and unforgiving, yet…oops, there goes your free time…and your friends…and your job. Assuming you've got a personality that revels in Sisyphean everquesting, this is all the game you'll ever need.

Progress Quest

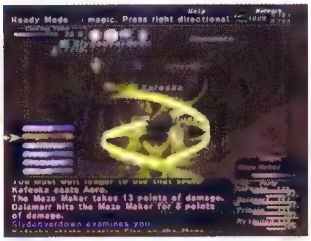
If you buy Final Fantasy XI thinking you're getting into something remotely like any other Final Fantasy game, you're in for a shock. The game's sensory presentation is the only thing really "Final Fantasy" about it—a gorgeously gender-neutral cast wanders around a world that's pretty even when it's ugly, where even the most vile enemies look like exotic tropical flowers. Chocobos trot by, trailing haunting orchestral themes that put other MMORPGs to shame.

The heart of the game is combat: Up to six characters (all of them real people out there, somewhere) engage in specific activities dictated by their chosen job—black mages stand back and deal out "nuke" damage, warriors stand up front "tanking" (taking blows and making sure everyone else doesn't), and bards sing songs to support the group. There are 15 professions all told, and knowledge of your job's place in society is essential if you want to survive and succeed. In between battles, you sit down to recover, chatting about what went wrong (often in a foreign language, l33t, or Japanese), Simpsons reruns, what's for dinner tonight…hopefully finding common interests and new friends, creating guilds, and becoming a part of the online community. It requires a large time commitment, and gameplay basically boils down to questing for levels—making progress for progress's sake. If this doesn't sound fun, then please, don't buy this game.

The Damselfly hits Osprey for 30 points of damage.
Osprey starts casting Cure on Osprey.
Kocosephia starts casting Cure on Osprey.

PROTIP: As a mage, stay as far back from the battle as possible so enemies' area-effect spells can't harm you.

PROTIP: Head to the Valkurm Dunes near Selbina at around Level 17 to do your sub-job quest. Ask around; lots of people there are doing it, too.



PROTIP: If you're a spell-caster, the Maze of Shakhrami is a good place to solo in your early teens. Kill only maze makers.

A Million Hours from Ifrit

Compared to some other games of its type, FFXI comes across as deliberate and unforgiving. The experience penalty for dying is atrocious (there's nothing more disheartening than losing two hours of work), there's lots of sitting, and once you reach a certain point (around Level 15), progress becomes painfully slow. The game also makes some welcome tweaks to the MMO formula—there are no corpse runs and no kill-stealing; there's a cool subjob system and nice cut-scenes in the quests to make you feel more involved in the game's metastory.

The game comes with (and preinstalled on) the PS2 hard drive, and initial setup is only minorly confusing; getting online after that is simple (feel free to put the discs in storage), and the game suffers from *zero* technical flaws. As far as which version is better, it's a toss-up: Do you prefer a friendlier crazy control scheme (PS2) or smoother, more high-res graphics (PC)?

Commands
spells and songs by type. Use
Kafeska starts casting Blaze Spikes on Kafeska.
Kafeska casts Blaze Spikes.
Kafeska gains the effect of Blaze Spikes.

PROTIP: If you're alone, be extra careful—always have your protective "buff" spells enabled, and "zone" if you're being trailed by a monster.

The Balance of Vana'Diel

Final Fantasy XI works because for every flaw, there's brilliant possibility—and for many console gamers, this could be the Holy Grail of nonlinearity they've been searching for: a wide-open, impossibly enormous RPG universe with Final Fantasy flair, defined by its players as much as its developers. Love it or hate it, there's nothing like it on your PS2.—*Star Dingo*

PROTIP: Unless your goal is just to piss people off, make sure you research your role (and what's expected of your class) before getting into a party with strangers.

Final Fantasy XI is a *very* slow-paced game. For example, a boat trip takes 15 minutes in real time.

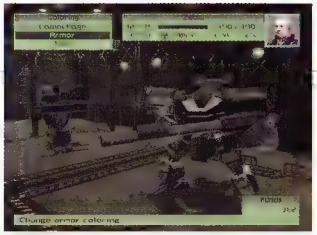
T

■ Developed by Square Enix ■ Published by Sony ■ $99.99 ■ Available now ■ RPG ■ Massively multiplayer

GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR	4.0
SOUND	4.5		
CONTROL	4.0		

Front Mission 4

If you have a fetish for mechs and love to indulge yourself with turn-based strategy games like Final Fantasy Tactics, then this is the game for you. Although Front Mission 4 is a great conjunction of fully customizable Armored Core–like mechs and the regulatory yet familiar mechanics of a turn-based battle system, there are definitely some areas where the game could have been improved.



PROTIP: Pay attention to your opponent's choice of weapons and armor. Keeping your mechs well protected against the enemy's dominant choice of firepower is half the battle.

Metallurgy

One of the sweeter things about Front Mission 4 is that each mech is separately and fully customizable to complement your strategy. At the start of the game, when battles are still simple, you may have only a few options to toy with—a puny gun or two, a shield, and a couple different camouflage paints—but things quickly get deeper. Each victory comes with new body parts, weapons, items, and even camouflages that could mean some heavy-duty retaliation. Players also have to pay attention to the skill levels and traits of their pilots. Each is given EP, or experience points, which are essential to obtaining new and interesting skills and abilities. Again, you get to control what each pilot learns.

PROTIP: Know which enemy units are linked to avoid unpredictable, devastating blows.

Front Mission 4's combat features some notable elements, including a linked battle system in which units can combine to form a very lethal force and a constantly ramping level of difficulty—conquer one group of enemy mechs, and the A.I. will make it harder for you to overcome your next opponent. Don't be surprised when you find yourself spending countless hours retrying one battle after another. The most notable omission is multiplayer—it would have been nice if the game had taken advantage of the PlayStation 2's networking options.

Square's irrefutable ability to produce realistic CG movies is once again on display in this game. Unfortunately, the graphics and sound during gameplay are a different story; it seems the developers neglected the landscapes in comparison to the mechs, and nothing exciting ever happens in the musical score. And while some cut-scenes are blessed with decent voice-acting sequences, others are cursed with silence—be prepared to have to do some reading at some point.

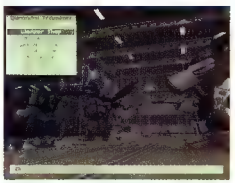
Giant Robots of Tomorrow

If all you need is a good challenge and you have the patience for turn-based strategy games, by all means, pick up this game. If the inconsistent presentation and lack of multiplayer options have you unconvinced, then it may be a good idea to wait for another one to come along.—*Test Monkey*

T ■ Developed by Square Enix ■ Published by Square Enix U.S.A.
■ $49.99 ■ Available now ■ Strategy/RPG ■ 1 player

This is from one of the two breathtaking CG movies you can watch before starting the game.

PROTIP: You have more accuracy when dealing ranged attacks at close range, but beware of foes with melee capabilities. They're better left to your snipers.



PROTIP: Never underestimate your opponent. Save before matches often so you can reconfigure your mechs each time you're defeated—it *will* happen.

GRAPHICS	3.5	FUN FACTOR	4.0
SOUND	3.5		
CONTROL	4.0		

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Resident Evil Outbreak

Resident Evil goes online, and so does the one-man show! In this ProStrategy Guide, we give you some of the important basics and advanced techniques that you need for you and your colleagues to survive. *By Major Mike*

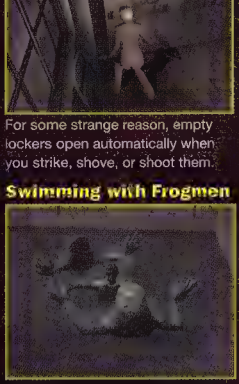
This ProStrategy Guide applies to the game as it plays on the Normal mode.

Basics

Lockers

For some strange reason, empty lockers open automatically when you strike, shove, or shoot them.

Swimming with Frogmen



If you have to swim with frogmen, press Attack Stance when they swim in close behind you. If you're timing is right, you'll duck under the water and they'll miss you. Never try to outswim a frogman—you'll lose every time.

Scenario 1: Outbreak

In the Outbreak Scenario, any character can combine the Raccoon Today newspaper with an Alcohol Bottle, and then combine that Newspaper + Bottle combination with the Lighter for five Molotov Cocktails. However, unlike other weapons, you must equip the Molotov Cocktail each time you use one, and up to five Molotov Cocktails take one slot in your item inventory; any number beyond that takes up two slots.

Key Characters

Each character in the original lineup has a specialty, but two in particular have very important abilities.

George Hamilton

George has the wonderful ability to create medicines out of various herbs and herb combinations. To create a medicine, combine any herb or herb combination with the Medical Set (a permanent fixture in his inventory).

Medicines

When the following herb or herb combinations are combined with George's Medical Set, the following medicines can be created. Some herb combinations, however, cannot create medicine.

Blue Herb = Recovery Medicine (heals a small amount of your wounds)
Green Herb = Antidote (purges poison from your body)
Red Herb = Hemostat (stops bleeding)
Blue + Green = Anti Virus (stops virus' growth for a long time)
Blue + Red = Recovery Medicine (L) (heals a big amount of your wounds)
Green + Green = N/A
Green + Red = N/A
Blue + Green + Green = Anti Virus (stops virus' growth for a short time)
Blue + Green + Red = Anti Virus (L) (stops virus' growth for a long time)
Green + Green + Green = N/A

David King

David has the advantage of being able to create items and make new weapons with his nine pieces of Vinyl Tape. Once David creates a weapon, he can present it to any of his colleagues so they can use it. Here are the weapons he can make:

Wooden Pole + Butcher Knife = Spear

You can use the Scrub Brush as a weapon until the brush falls off; once it does, you can combine the remaining Wooden Pole with the Butcher Knife and create a Spear.

Concrete Piece + Iron Pipe = Hammer

Battery + Iron Pipe = Stun Rod

Pesticide Spray + Lighter = Flame Spray (9 rounds)

J's Bar 1F

Women's Bathroom

Item in Women's Bathroom
Scrub Brush

Men's Bathroom

Items in Men's Bathroom
Green Herb
Handgun

Stairs Between 1F and 2F

Items in Stairs Between 1F and 2F
Green Herb
Playing Manual 2 (File)

Items in J's Bar
Butcher Knife
First-Aid Spray
Green Herb
Pesticide
Playing Manual 1 (File)
Staff Room Key

J's Bar

Push the two large barrels against the door, and then take the Staff Room Key from off the top of the bar. Visiting the adjacent rooms is optional.

What About Bob?

At the start of the Scenario, you may notice an injured character that isn't an NPC or regular character. This is Bob, Mark's buddy, and taking him to the Rooftop adds to this Scenario's completion percentage.

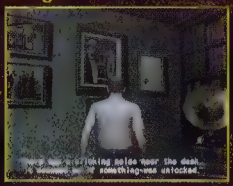
Staff Room

You can find the Key with Blue Tag in the Staff Room underneath the copy of Raccoon Today. Use this key to open the door along the north wall that's almost directly across from the Locker Room. The Staff Room is the only place you must visit on this floor, but there are several optional items to be found in the adjacent rooms.

Barricade

The wooden boards leaning near the doorway aren't just for show—you can use them to make a barricade. Take the Nail Gun off the desk in the Staff Room and use it on the boards to slow the advancing zombies and buy some time so you can plot your next move...just make sure no one is on the other side of the barricade. You can use the Nail Gun as a weapon, but it only has 20 rounds and cannot be reloaded.

Shotgun



In the Owner's Room is a locked desk drawer. To open it, take any Alcohol Bottle from J's Bar 3F and insert it into the picture adjacent to the locked desk in the Owner's Room. You can also find Jack's Memo in the same drawer.

Staff Room

Items in Staff Room
Key with Blue Tag
Nail Gun
Raccoon Today
Red Herb

Break Room

Items in Break Room
Handgun Rounds
Indoor Blueprint (Map)
Iron Pipe (under the bed)

Owner's Room

Items in Owner's Room
Blue Herb
Green Herb
"Jack's Memo" (File)
Shotgun

Drawing Room

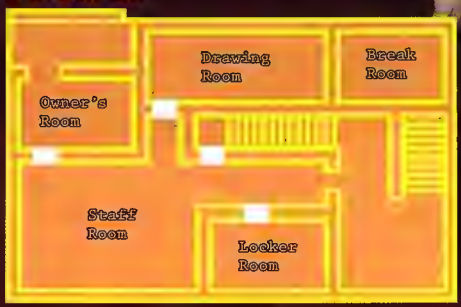
The cabinet against the east wall can only be unlocked by Alyssa (use the S-Shaped Pick); there's a Handgun inside. One caveat: If you stay in this room too long, a crow will fly through the window and attack.

Items in Drawing Room
Handgun (in locked chest)
Handgun Rounds
Iron Pipe
Lighter

Locker Room

Items in Locker Room
Anti Virus
Blue Herb
"Diary of Bar's Staff" (File)
Handgun Rounds

J's Bar 2F



Liquor Room

When you enter the Liquor Room, go through the door to your character's right and into the Wine Room. Take the Forklift Key.

Return to the Liquor Room, go to the forklift at the end of the hall, and use the key to power the machine and raise the crates so they're flush with the catwalk that's near the ceiling.

You can climb the ladder and follow your colleagues to the next area; or, if you wait long enough, the shutter near the forklift will open (this is the route you must take if you are trying to save Bob).

Items in Liquor Room
- Alcohol Bottle (x3)
- Blue Herb
- Green Herb

Wine Room

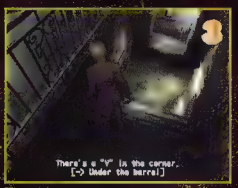
Items in Wine Room
- Alcohol Bottle
- Forklift Key
- Jack's Diary (Special Item)
- "Play Single Player Mode" (File)
- Shotgun Rounds
- Typewriter

Hidden Messages

There are four hidden messages scrawled in different places in this scenario. These messages are in dark areas, so you must have—and use—the Lighter to read them. One message reveals the location of the other, so you must read them in the following order:

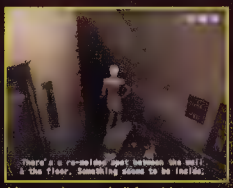
The first clue is in the Liquor Room in the southwest corner.

The second clue is on the Rooftop in the southern section along the west fence.



The third clue is on 3F to Rooftop Stairway on the south wall (the section of stairs between the open floor vent and the top of the staircase).

The final clue is in the Liquor Room in the southern section along the east wall in the corner.



After you've read all four hints, you can find the prize at Top Floor of the Apartment—a Spear located in the small recess right next to the elevator. Use the Lighter to pinpoint its location. If you didn't read all four preceding clues in the order outlined above, you won't be able to get the Spear.

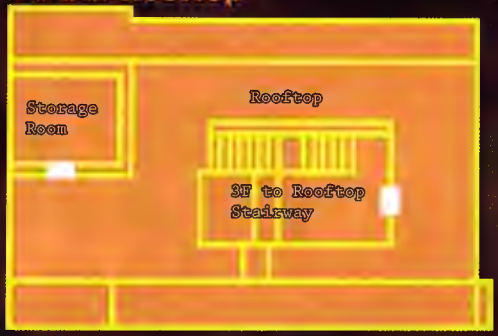
3F Rooftop to Stairway

The Storage Room Key is on the desk across from the door that leads to the Rooftop. Getting the key is optional, and it opens the Storage Room.

Item in 3F Rooftop to Stairway
- Storage Room Key

J's Bar 3F

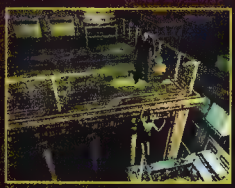
J's Bar Rooftop



Rooftop

The easiest way to shoot one of the attacking crows is to wait until it swoops in on a colleague—when it does, blast it.

Look for the fence across from the door to the Storage Room, and shoot, hit, or strike it repeatedly. When the gate falls, a three-minute timer starts, so climb up the ledge and start moving. You must make it to In Front of J's Bar before the timer reaches zero.



You must run and jump over the gap at the east end of the catwalk. Once you're safely across, you can help your colleagues who may be having trouble by standing over them and then pressing OK/Attack as they dangle from the ledge. If a crow hits any character that's dangling, they'll fail to their death.

Items on Rooftop
- Green Herb
- Handgun Rounds
- Raccoon Today
- Vinyl Sheet (Special)

Storage Room

The Handgun Magazine rests atop some shelves. You can obtain it by standing on the nearby crates.

Items in Storage Room
- First Aid Spray
- Handgun Magazine

Top Floor of the Apartment

Examine the elevator and then press the button to open the door.

Items in Top Floor Of the Apartment
- Red Herb
- Spear

J's Bar 1F
1F of the Apartment

When the elevator stops, take the Green Herb. The hallway ends in a T-shape and there is a zombie to your character's right, so run to the left, go down the hallway, and through the door.

Item in 1F of the Apartment
- Green Herb

In Front of J's Bar

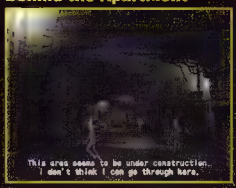
When you reach this area, zombies are advancing from the west. The object is to push two different cars to set up a barricade. If you want to save ammo and are in danger of getting overrun, run over to the police officer manning the Shotgun (he never runs out of ammo).

Both cars to be pushed have their hoods heading west—keep walking into the backs of these two cars to start pushing them. You can find the Vicinity Map on the side of one of the nonmovable police cars.

After both cars have been pushed, stay near the officer with the shotgun until you're able to move on to the next section.

Item in Front of J's Bar
Vicinity Map

Behind the Apartment

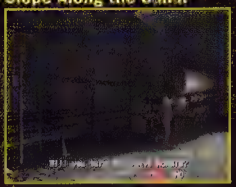


The objective here is to keep the advancing zombies away from the officer, who fires repeatedly at the locked door at the north end of the alley. Stand by the officer, face south, and shoot or shove any advancing zombies away.

The more times the officer is attacked, the longer it takes for him to create your escape route.

Items Behind the Apartment
First Aid Spray
Handgun Bullets
Iron Pipe

Slope Along the Canal



If you kept the Lighter, proceed directly to the gas tanker at the far end of the street—if not, you can find one on the dead cop near the entrance of this area (along with a Shotgun). In either case, once you reach the tanker, examine the rear of the tanker and then turn the valve handle. After the ensuing cinema, stand off of the pool of flammable liquid, enter your inventory, and select the Lighter.

After everything catches fire, jump off the ledge and into the water below. Swim to the small opening and pull yourself up and into the next area. If you wait too long on the ledge, the tanker will explode, incinerating you.

Items at Slope Along the Canal
Lighter
Shotgun

Tunnel

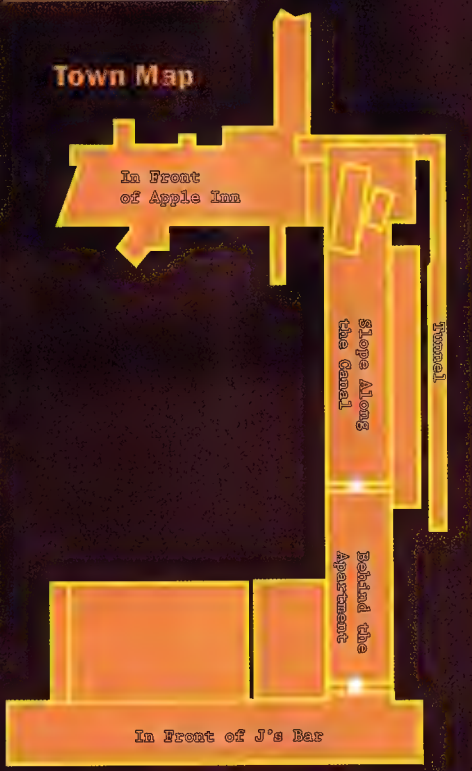
Arriving at the tunnel marks the first of a few areas unpopulated by zombies and monsters. You can find a total of four herbs in the Tunnel.

Items in Tunnel
Blue Herb
Green Herb
Red Herb (x2)

In Front of Apple Inn

To move on to the next area, talk to the police officer when he stands still.

Items in Front of Apple Inn
Green Herb
"Raccoon Today" (File)



Behind the Residential Area

When the van stops at the barricade, load up on ammo and health supplies. You can find the Magnum Revolver near the top of the short flight of steps before the Footbridge.

Items Behind the Residential Area
- 45 Auto Rounds
- Blue Herb
- First Aid Spray (x2)
- Handgun Rounds
- Magnum Revolver
- Red Herb
- Shotgun (x2)
- Shotgun Rounds (x2)

Footbridge

When you're about halfway across the Footbridge, a cinema starts. After the cinema, you can proceed ahead to Main Street or backtrack to Behind the Residential Area and talk to police officer who drove the van. If all your living colleagues are in this area with you, the officer will take you out of the area and the Scenario will end.

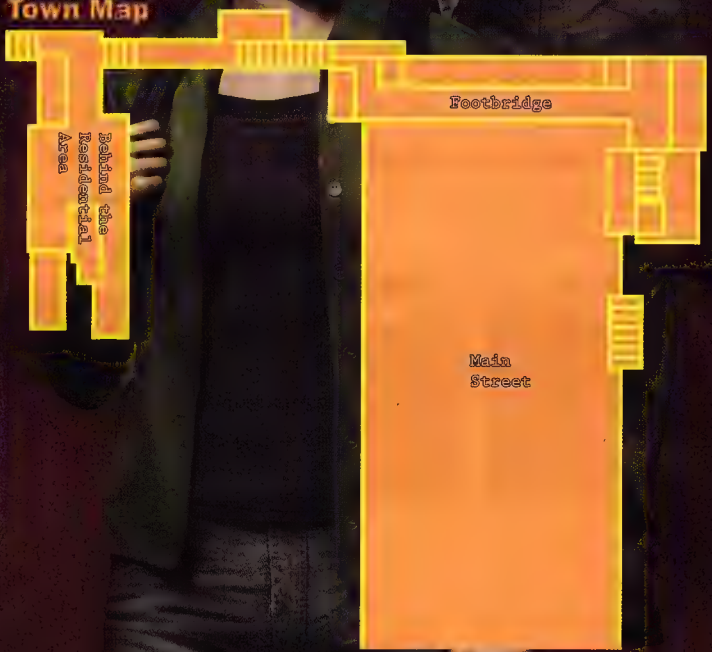
Main Street

At Main Street, you must find two items (Detonator Handle and Detonator Main Unit), assemble them, and then use them on the control panel in the middle of the street.

Although there are several zombies lumbering around, only two or three will find you interesting (if you have the Magnum Revolver, you should have no trouble taking them down).

Items on Main Street
- Detonator Handle
- Detonator Main Unit

Town Map



WINNING

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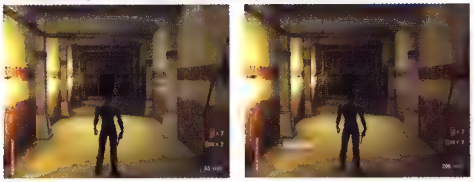
Please include your name, address, and phone number so we can award you your prize.

WIN!

READER TIP OF THE MONTH

THE SUFFERING

Grenades, Molotov Cocktails, and More



During gameplay, **simultaneously press and hold L1, R1, and ×**, and then enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming message.

Grenades: Press Right, Right, Right, Left, Left, Left.

Molotov Cocktails: Press Down, Down, Down, Up, Up, Up.

Refill Current Gun Ammo: Press Right, Right, Down, Up, Left, Right, Left, Left, R2.

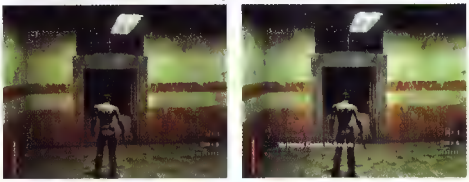
Refill Throw Weapon Ammo: Press Left, Left, Up, Down, Right, Left, Right, Right, R2.

Suicide: Press Down, Down, Down, Down.

Sean Currin—Pasadena, California

THE SUFFERING

Refill Current Gun Ammo, Suicide, and More



During gameplay, **simultaneously press and hold L, R, and X**, and then enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming message.

Grenades: Press Right, Right, Right, Left, Left, Left.

Molotov Cocktails: Press Down, Down, Down, Up, Up, Up.

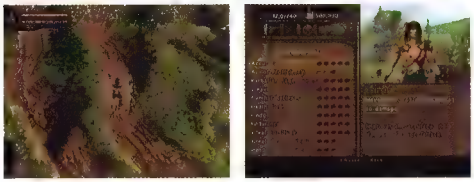
Refill Current Gun Ammo: Press Right, Right, Down, Up, Left, Right, Left, Left, A.

Refill Throw Weapon Ammo: Press Left, Left, Up, Down, Right, Left, Right, Right, A.

Suicide: Press Down, Down, Down, Down.

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

Cheat Menu and Level 10 Character



Cheat Menu: During gameplay, **simultaneously press and hold L, R, A, B, X, and Y, and then press Start.** If you entered the code correctly, the cheat menu will appear.

Level 10 Character: During gameplay, **simultaneously press and hold L, R, A, B, X, and Y, and then press White, White.** If you entered the code correctly, your character will be at Level 10.

STAR TREK: SHATTERED UNIVERSE

All Missions Open, All Ships, and More

At the main bridge screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming sound.

All Medals and Ranks: Press L1, R1, L1, ○, R1, △, L1, Select.

All Missions Open: Press R1, L1, ○, □, L1, R1, △, Select.

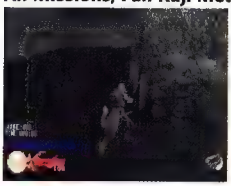
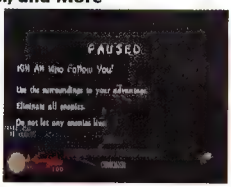
All Ships: Press L1, □, L1, □, R1, R1, ○, Select.

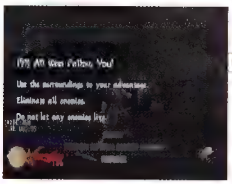
Invincibility: Press L1, ○, L1, R1, △, △, ○, Select.

Kobayashi Maru Difficulty: Press L1, △, L1, L1, □, △, R1, Select.

TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS

All Missions, Full Kuji Meter, and More



All Characters: At the title screen, **simultaneously press and hold Black and White, and then press Up, Right, Left, Down. Release Black and White, and then press L, R.** If done correctly, you'll hear a sound and all characters will be available.

All Items: At the Items screen, **simultaneously press and hold L and R, and then press Up, Down, Up, Down, X, X, X, Left, Right, Left, Right, X, X, X.** If done correctly, you'll hear a sound and all items will appear.

All Mission Layouts: At the Mission Select screen, **press Right Thumbstick, Left Thumbstick, L, R, White, Black.** If done correctly, all layouts will be unlocked for each available mission.

All Missions: At the Mission Select screen, **press White, White, L, R, Right, X, Left Thumbstick, Right Thumbstick.** If done correctly, red arrows will appear on the map and all missions will be available.

All Special Abilities: Pause the game, **simultaneously press and hold Black and R, and then press Up, Up, Down, Down. Release Black and R, and then press X, X, L, R.** If done correctly, the special abilities menu will appear.

Full Kuji Meter: Pause the game, **simultaneously press and hold L and R, and then press Left, Left, Left, Right, X.** If you entered the code correctly, your Kuji meter will be full.

Increase Kuji Meter: Pause the game and then **press Left, Left, Left, Right, X.** If done correctly, your Kuji meter will increase by one.

Increase Score: Pause the game, **simultaneously press and hold Black and White, and then press Right, Right, Right, Left.** If done correctly, the game will automatically resume and your score will increase.

More Health: Pause the game and then **press Up, Down, Up, Down, X, X, X.** If done correctly, the game will resume and your health will be replenished.

Replenish All Items: At the Items screen, **simultaneously press and hold L and R, and then press Up, Left, Down, Right, X, X, X.** If done correctly, the stock of your items will replenish.

Show Score: Pause the game and then **press Right, Right, Right, Left.** If you entered the code correctly, the game will automatically resume and show your score.

Unlock B-Sides: At the title screen, **simultaneously press and hold L and R, and then press Down, X, X, Up, X, X, Left, X, X, Right, X, X.** If done correctly, you'll hear a sound. Now, go to the main menu and select Options. At the Options screen, choose Audio, and at the Audio screen, select Languages, where you'll now be able to select B-Sides.

ESPN NBA BASKETBALL 2K4

All 24/7 Mode Items

At the Main Menu, select 24/7 mode and then enter `HUNT` (case-sensitive) as your first name and `4TREASURE` (case-sensitive) as your last name. If you entered the codes correctly, you'll find all items in 24/7 mode unlocked.

MTX MOTOTRAX

Super-Fast Acceleration

At the main menu, select Options, and at the Options screen, select Cheats. At the Enter Cheat Code screen, enter `JIH345` and then select Try Code. If you entered the code correctly, you'll have super-fast acceleration during gameplay.

NHL RIVALS 2004

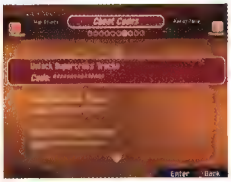
All Agitators, All Snipers, and More

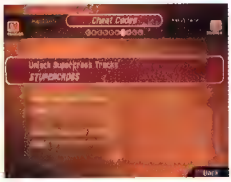
At the Main Menu, choose Options and then select Unlocks. Highlight the cheat you want to unlock, **press A**, and then enter the corresponding code. If you entered the code correctly, you'll receive a message.

All Agitators:	PESTFEST
All Balanced:	EVENSTEVEN
All Enforcers:	BRUISERS
All Snipers:	SHOOTOUT
Big Players:	BIGDUDES
Big Puck:	BIGBUSCUIT
Heavy Shot Trails:	THESTREAK
NHL Rivals East All-Stars:	CUJOEAST
NHL Rivals West All-Stars:	CUJOWEST
No Bounce Dasherboards:	DEADBOARDS
Small Players:	TINYTYKES
Unlimited Speed Bursts:	CAFFEINE
XSN Sports East All-Stars:	XSNSPORTSEAST
XSN Sports West All-Stars:	XSNSPORTSWEST
Zero Ice Friction:	AIRHOCKEY

MX UNLEASHED

500cc Bikes, A.I. Bowling, and More





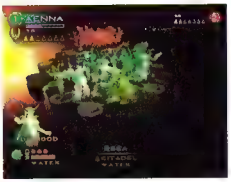
At the main menu, select Options, and at the Options screen, **press L or R** to select Cheat Codes. At the Cheat Codes screen, scroll down to the desired cheat and then **press X**. Enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the code correctly, you'll automatically return to the Cheat Codes screen.

Passwords are case-sensitive.

500cc Bikes:	3LEGGOS
A.I. Bowling:	WRECKINGBALL
Expert A.I.:	OBTGOFAST
Freestyle Tracks:	BUSTBIG
National Tracks:	ECONATION
Supercross Tracks:	STUPERCROSS
Unlock Machines:	MINIGAMES

WRATH UNLEASHED

Character Variations and Large World Map Characters



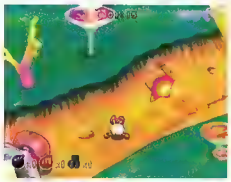
Character Variations in Team Fighter Mode: At the Build Team screen, **press L, L, Down, Down, Black, White, Black, White, R, L, Black, R, R, White**. If done correctly, you'll hear a sound.

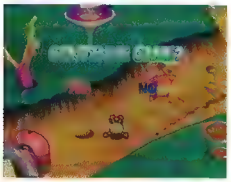
Character Variations in Versus Mode: At the Select Character screen, **press L, L, Down, Down, Black, White, Black, White, R, L, Black, R, R, White**. If done correctly, you'll hear a sound.

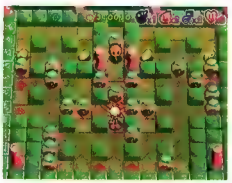
Large World Map Characters: At the title screen, **press Left, X, Up, Y, Right, B, Down, B**. If done correctly, you'll hear a sound.

BOMBERMAN JETTERS

Unlock Bomber Mansion Mode



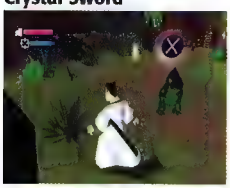




At the main menu, start a new game, and once you have control of Bomberman, bomb yourself to death. When the game asks you if you want to continue, select No. If done correctly, Bomber Mansion mode will be selectable at the main menu.

SAMURAI JACK: THE SHADOW OF AKU

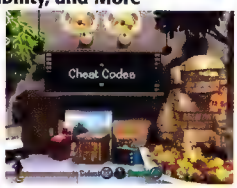
Crystal Sword



Pause the game, **simultaneously press and hold Down on the Left Analog Stick and Up on the Right Analog Stick, and then press** ×, ○, □, △. If you entered the code correctly, you'll have the crystal sword.

LOONEY TUNES: BACK IN ACTION

Access All Areas, Invulnerability, and More

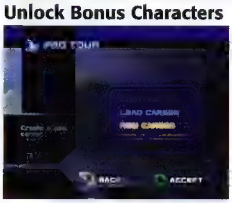


At the Main Menu, select Options, and at the Options screen, choose Cheat Codes. At the Cheat Codes screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheat. If you entered the code correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

$500:	BMUNKEY
Access All Areas:	PASSPORT
ACME Shrink Ray:	WEENY
Cannon Ball Costume:	CANNON
Danger Duck Costume:	DANGERD
Duck Danger Battle:	OUTTAKE
Free Costume Doors:	SUITSYOU
Gossamer Doors Revealed:	GOBBLE
Hen Grenades:	HENSAWAY
Invulnerability:	TOUGHAGE
Slappy Fish:	SLAPPY
Wile E. Coyote Game:	FURRYOUS

TRANSWORLD SURF: NEXT WAVE

Unlock Bonus Characters



At the main menu, select Pro Tour and then enter SCHRALP (case-sensitive) as your career name. If done correctly, bonus characters will be selectable at the character select screen.

GLADIUS

1000 Gold, Instant Experience, and More

1000 Gold: At the School menu, pause the game and then **press Right, Down, Left, Up, Left, Left, Left, Left, Y, Left**. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming sound.

Instant Experience: At the School menu, pause the game and then **press Right, Down, Left, Up, Left, Left, Left, Left, Y, Y, Y**. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming sound.

Lower Level Enemies: At the League Office menu, pause the game and then **press Right, Right, Right, Up, Up, Left, Left, Left, Left, Right, Down, Down, Down, Down, Up**. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming sound.

No Equipment Limit: At the School menu, pause the game and then **press Right, Down, Left, Up, Left, Left, Left, Left, Y, Y, Y**. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming sound.

NASCAR THUNDER 2004

Unlock All Fantasy Drivers

At the main menu, choose Features, and at the Features screen, select Create-A-Car. Create a new car, and enter `extra drivers` (case-sensitive) as your driver's name. Save your car, and if you entered the code correctly, a confirming screen will appear.

GLADIUS

1000 Gold, Higher Level Enemies, And Instant Experience

1000 Gold: At the School menu, pause the game and then **press Right, Down, Left, Up, Left, Left, Left, Left, Y, Left**. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming sound.

Higher Level Enemies: At the League Office menu, pause the game and then **press Right, Right, Right, Up, Up, Left, Left, Left, Left, Right, Up, Up, Up, Down**. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming sound.

Instant Experience: At the School menu, pause the game and then **press Right, Down, Left, Up, Left, Left, Left, Left, Y, Y, Y**. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming sound.

CORVETTE

All Cars and Courses

At the Main Menu, select Options, and at the Game Options screen, select Change Name and then enter `XOPENSEZ` (case-sensitive) as your player name. If you entered the code correctly, all cars and courses will be available.

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Academy of Art College 93
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Activision, Inc. 26, 27, 82, 83
ACTIVISION.COM

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ATARI.COM

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and Development, Inc. ..... 116, 3rd Cover
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CAPITOLCONNECT.COM/ESA

ESPN 20, 21
ESPN.COM

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FULLSAIL.COM

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INTECLINK.COM

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MD/Mountain Dew 15
MOUNTAINDEW.COM

Microsoft Xbox 13, 47, 97
MICROSOFT.COM

Midway Games 42, 43, 73
MIDWAY.COM

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GOTMILK.COM

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NINTENDO.COM

Novalogic 79
NOVALOGIC.COM

Nvidia 5
NVIDIA.COM

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Entertainment America, Inc. 2, 3
SCEA.COM

Square Enix U.S.A., Inc. 10, 11
SQUARE-ENIX-USA.COM

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ROCKSTARGAMES.COM

Ubisoft 52, 53
UBISOFT.COM

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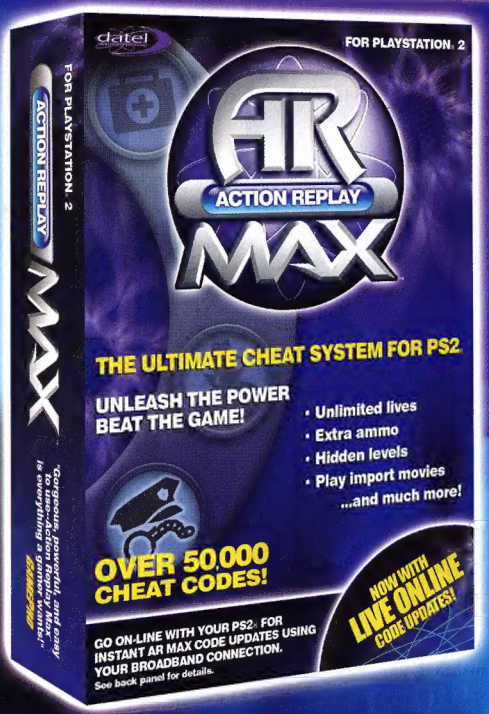

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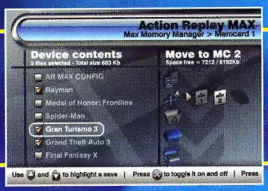

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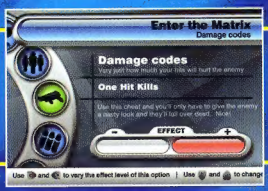

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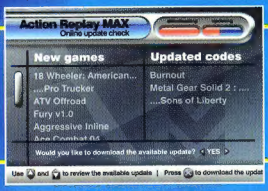

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